UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

‘EYEBALLS IN THE SKY !’

The Development of the verbal and visual languages of
***The Perishers* Newspaper Comic Strip (1958-1987) -**
A Practice-Based Study

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Doctor of Philosophy 2016

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Preface

I, James Jonathan Pyman, declare that the enclosed submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and consisting of a written thesis and artists publication which displays visual material from the research meets the regulations stated in the handbook for the mode of submission selected and approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee of the University of Derby.

I declare that this submission is my own work and has not been submitted for any other academic award. The use of all materials from sources other than my own work has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Abstract

Comics and newspaper strip cartoons are increasingly recognised for their contribution to 21st century visual practice. In America there is currently substantial critical and creative examination into newspaper strips, where recent attention has focused on contemporary cartoonists such as Chris Ware, Art Spiegelman and Dan Clowes who draw on historical material to inform and develop contemporary comics culture. This PhD study documents and examines the history of *The Perishers* newspaper comic strip ('Daily Mirror', 1958-2006). This is one of many British strips that have received little to no critical attention relative to equivalent American cultural properties. In the absence of prevailing discourse on British material it is timely to record the contribution made by *The Perishers* to comics culture.

The study examines the 28-year working relationship of *The Perishers* creators Maurice Dodd and Dennis Collins and collates images of hundreds of never-reprinted strips accessed from the British Newspaper Library digital archive. *The Perishers* is considered by adopting the American historical model of collecting, anthologising, synthesising and creatively responding to examine a previously critically overlooked cultural property. In order to structure my analysis I also examine other 'Daily Mirror' strips and provide an overview and close reading of *The Perishers*. *The Perishers* is further contextualised by consideration of its place within my own development and processes as a visual artist.

Founded in an examination of my own work, this doctoral project engages with *The Perishers* through pastiche and assimilation in a new body of work that transforms the act of comics production into a close reading of its sources. Central to the doctoral study is the application of art practice as a critical form of looking. An exhibition and artists publication entitled *The Scruffy Herberts* present key creative works that address the narrative, verbal and visual development of a newspaper strip to offer a live experience in which the viewer's interpretation of the art work mirrors the processes by which an understanding of *The Perishers* was formed. Deploying practice-based research in this arena has provided a meditative space for the maker to reflect on how the source work has evolved from the past whilst having the capacity for revealing and describing new relations in the source material, be they maker or work of art.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge the importance in my life of my late mother Molly Pyman for giving me the time and the space to read and draw when I was a child, for believing that was important, and for buying me my first comics and starting me on the path to being an artist.

I would also like to thank my supervisory team, Robert Clark, Professor Huw Davies and Jane Stanton for their conversation, direction, and recommendations.

I would especially like to thank Dr Judy Collins and Mike Dodd for granting me interviews and sharing invaluable insights into their fathers' working processes, outlooks and family lives. I would also like to thank Ken Layson, the cartoon editor of the 'Daily Mirror' for information on how the comics page was put together.

I would like to thank friends and colleagues who have supported and encouraged me throughout the study period; Hilary Lloyd, Bob Partridge, Tony White, Caspar Williams and Dr Stephen Wilson.

Most of all I would like to thank Penny for her advice, support and endless patience throughout this journey.

James Pyman,
Sheffield, October 2016

Introduction:

The focus of this PhD by Practice has been to generate new understandings of the British newspaper comic strip and its relation to the field of contemporary visual practice by examining *The Perishers* strip from the perspective of my own art work. This research has evolved over the last eight years from 2008-2016. Originally proposed as a specific investigation of the development of *The Perishers*, it has expanded to examine *The Perishers* within the broader context of the 'Daily Mirror' newspaper comic page, the other strips it was published alongside, and as one point of influence in the locus of my own artistic research and practice.

The Perishers ('Daily Mirror', 1958-2006) was written by Maurice Dodd and principally drawn by Dennis Collins and was editorially developed as a British version of Charles Schultz's *Peanuts*. Set in a fictional suburban town called West Croynge, it documented the light-hearted exploits of a group of young children, and was one of a group of post-war British newspaper strips that incorporated social satire, pop-cultural commentary and an evolving graphic sensibility.

Research Rationale

The rationale for this research was prompted by the lack of historical information about British newspaper comics in general and *The Perishers* in particular. I had become aware of this absence in 2005 while writing and drawing an artists' book called *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* that took the form of the biography of a fictional British editorial cartoonist. Although there was some available source material regarding editorial and political cartoons and cartoonists, there was a dearth of information on British newspaper comic strips and their creators. I wanted to address the question of why this was the case, given that creative endeavours like *The Perishers* and other 'Daily Mirror' strips such as *Andy Capp* and *Garth* were an intrinsic element of a very popular British newspaper for nearly fifty years.

A further aspect of the research context for this approach and critical reappraisal are recent publications from North American cartoonists such as Chester Brown, Daniel Clowes, Seth and Chris Ware that draw on the history of American newspaper comic strips for source material and inspiration.

Research Aims

- To gather all extant historical and biographical material on *The Perishers* and other contemporaneous 'Daily Mirror' newspaper strips to create a research archive.
- To examine *The Perishers* through practical research applying drawing as a critical method.
- To produce a body of art work that will lead to significant advances in understanding and insights into the source material.
- To disseminate the outcomes of this research to organisations and individuals who may benefit from this research.

Research Questions

- Why, although there has been an increased interest in the reprinting and examination of newspaper comic strips in North America in recent decades, has there been no equivalent consideration in Britain? What could be learned from the American model of historicisation and critical enquiry in this context?
- How did *The Perishers* reflect and comment on social and cultural shifts through its history? How did the backgrounds of its creators bear upon this work?
- How might art works produced through this research contribute to the advancement of knowledge in visual practice?

Research Objectives

This research aimed to produce four key outputs:

1. One of the objectives was to research the history of the editorial development, creative content and social relevance of American newspaper strips in order to provide a comparative model for the British strip. My research therefore considered how a newspaper strip provides an ongoing commentary on social, cultural and political events. Whereas the specific purpose of the daily editorial cartoon is to examine a current event or issue, how could an ongoing cartoon strip also address social, domestic and political concerns? It seemed essential to examine the history of *The Perishers* as a space where such everyday concerns were discussed, albeit through the prism of childhood and childlike understanding. This model of practice could be considered and contrasted with Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* to provide an insight into transatlantic cultural and contextual difference.

2. The second key objective was to critically appraise *The Perishers* by applying my own art practice as a research method that would be integral to the process. In the same manner that the research adopted a transatlantic model and *The Perishers* emerged out of the themes and concerns of *Peanuts*, I made a body of artwork that similarly emerged from *The Perishers*. This historical and social enquiry was articulated as a body of creative research within the practice-based context. Using drawing practice as a critical method I focused on the historical development of a cultural property, its relationship to a changing culture, and its development from being a version or appropriation of a pre-existing artifact. This in essence is a pastiche of a pastiche. The use of pastiche as a critical method reflects postmodern and meta-textual practices and has correspondences in fine art practice in such diverse works as those of Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince and Elaine Sturtevant and the appropriationist works of artists using pre-existing works such as Roy Lichtenstein and Jeff Koons. It also has a parallel history in comics culture in magazines like *Mad*, *Raw* and *Weirdo* which are examined within the critical context and my own working method.

3. A further objective was to amass an archive of *The Perishers* publications and relevant related material. As well as constructing a collection of both published and never reprinted strips I also conducted interviews with *The Perishers* creators' offspring Mike Dodd and Dr Judy Collins to produce biographies of their fathers and these have produced new insights into their histories and working process.

4. I also wished to gain insight into questions and problems in strands of my own practice that I felt would be best developed through PhD research that would open new challenges. Although I have been making work for over twenty years, I had completed my BA some time ago when I had experienced a particular kind of education which, although highly valuable, I did not feel encompassed many aspects of practice and I was seeking new forms both of critical language and image-making to articulate my ideas.

Research Method

Throughout the research process my critical strategy has been to apply drawing as a method for knowledge acquisition. I am interested in the creative and critical capacities that are invoked in the making of an art work, particularly when applied to the study of newspaper cartoons as this has resonance with the incarnation of *The Perishers* in relation to its American counterparts. Examining the source material through drawing enables close study of the image and its construction that is not possible through a text-based method of analysis. The aim of

this approach was to place my visual commentary of *The Perishers* in a new context through exhibitions and publications to generate fresh discursive contexts not only for *The Perishers* but also for the practical research methods I developed in response to Dodd and Collins' approach.

All of the research, findings and the development of the creative outcomes are detailed in this thesis which is structured as follows:

Chapter One: Memoir, Collection & Archive

This chapter examines my own childhood experience of reading as a model to consider the newspaper comic strip and the way that it relates to the world, and applies the intersection between my own biography and its pertinence to my practice to echo the place of biography within the framework of *The Perishers*. Biography is considered to afford practical understanding of the way in which it has informed composition, location and language in the strip cartoon.

The chapter takes the form of an extended memoir to examine how identity is defined by social circumstance, geography, social history and popular culture. *The Perishers* is contextualised as one aspect of a lifetime of reading and collecting. As a child I had read *Perishers* book collections as well as many other British and American comic books and cartoon strips. I amassed an extensive collection of comics books, strips and ephemera that I continue to use as an archive to investigate comics production, illustrative technique, narrative and biography within the context of a fine art practice.

This memoiristic approach establishes the framework of close reading, anecdotal experience, biography, parody and pastiche that the PhD study deploys in relation to the examination of newspaper cartoon strips and other aspects of comics culture and criticism.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Critical Context

During the initial PhD research period I identified a gap of available knowledge and scholarly activity in the area. There is an almost total absence of critical material relating to *The Perishers* and even less on numerous other 'Daily Mirror' newspaper strips of the period. The material on each strip generally amounts to a paragraph in a handful of general comics surveys. Even this usually notes only the strips' publication dates, the names of creators and characters and, in the case of *The Perishers*, the unspecific observation that it was conceived of as a British equivalent of *Peanuts*.

As well as providing an opportunity to develop this minimal knowledge base through interviews, collection of material and subsequent critical and creative analysis, this absence of material was also in part the *subject* of the study. In America over the last 50 years there has been a growing amount of critical appraisal, substantial anthologising and reprinting and, more recently, a number of retrospective exhibitions and catalogues related to newspaper comic strip culture. I contrast this with the limited amount of equivalent British critical and contextual material.

This chapter also compares examples of self-reflexivity and parody in post-war American and British comics culture, particularly in relation to newspaper strips, and how they have provided a social and cultural commentary. This history provides the critical context for the method and creative approach used in examining *The Perishers*.

Chapter Three: Method - Parody, Pastiche & Process

This chapter critically reflects on the development of my practice to contribute to the understanding and evaluation of that work within the context of this study. I detail how my practice has developed over the last twenty years as a sequence of projects influenced by and focusing on particular strands of comics making. These include self-published comic book *Nine Panel Grid*, the large-scale pencil drawings that form my gallery practice and artists publications *The Adventures of Lionel* and *Wilf – A Life In Pictures*. Each creative output adopts certain formal, contextual or conceptual strictures pertinent to the model. Starting with this core model of the comic book, projects have developed through research and collecting, close reading, critical examination and sustained practice. I discuss how these drawings and publications emerged out of childhood reading and experience and their ongoing and mutating significance in my work.

A number of further creative outcomes have been achieved as the result of this investigation. My work has been commissioned and exhibited at various stages of this research. These peer-reviewed contexts created opportunities to test and review my progress at key stages of the research and are listed in Appendix Four.

The Perishers is discussed and analysed as one strand of an interdisciplinary process that combines pastiche, fandom, homage, analysis and a fictionalizing of forms, structures and visual languages to examine ideas of nostalgia, social history and memory. Although this way of working emerged out of the postmodernist art practices of the 1990s investigating parody or

pastiche, this process has not been applied to the analysis of this material. My own creative process incorporates the influences of alternate history and retrospective continuity as conceptual and narrative devices and analytical tools borrowed from comic books as childhood reading to feed back into themes, projects and artworks decades later.

Chapter Four: The 'Daily Mirror' & *The Perishers* Creators

This chapter is a brief history of the 'Daily Mirror' newspaper and its place as a laboratory for the development of the British newspaper comic strip. The newspaper published a number of notable comic strips that were initially imitative of specific American strips, and those pertinent to *The Perishers* timeframe are examined and discussed. This will locate *The Perishers* material as part of a creative, editorial and social framework and also substantially expand the archive of previously undiscussed material.

Using interviews I conducted with Mike Dodd and Dr Judy Collins together with collected archival material, this chapter also contextualises the work of the strips' writer and artist through descriptions of their backgrounds, careers and worldviews. The purpose of this is twofold: to address a gap in existing research and also to reflect on the social context and creative process that shaped the construction of *The Perishers* strip. The focus of this chapter is mainly on the strands of work that intersect with 'real life' occurrences whilst detailed biographical material is contained in full interviews appended to this thesis (Appendices Two & Three).

Chapter Five: 'Eyeballs In The Sky' – The Development Of *The Perishers* (1958-1987)

This chapter examines the development of *The Perishers* strip in detail from 1959 until artist Dennis Collins' retirement as illustrator in 1987. It records the introduction of long-running characters, repeated events and themes, and comprises a close reading of selected strips which are key markers in the strip's history. The strip developed a series of structures, from the pace and staging of daily episodes through week-long and extended narratives to an annual structure subdivided by holidays, events and celebrations. Significant among these is the yearly 'Eyeballs In The Sky' narrative which gives this thesis its title and revolves around a cast of crabs in a Dorset rock pool. Given the sheer number of individual strips in this period this reading of key strips will inevitably be partial and can only give a sense of the strip through selective and representative consideration. The chapter structures *The Perishers* as a four-stage model moving from experimentation through refinement to a mannerist stage.

Chapter Six: Practice - *The Scruffy Herberts* (2008-2016)

This chapter reflects on the most significant aspect of this research: a body of art work that is in parts homage, pastiche, analysis and meta-narrative of *The Perishers*. It takes *The Perishers*' oft-mentioned critical status as a 'British *Peanuts*' as a starting point and is a creative reimagining of a 'Pyman-ish *Perishers*' called 'The Scruffy Herberts'. This new body of comic strips similarly details a cast of fictional child characters and operates as a form of reflective appropriation. Under consideration are the source material of *The Perishers*, its context as a pastiche of *Peanuts*, its personal significance as one aspect of an adolescent reading retreat, and its existence as a record of a textual and visual laboratory for a writer and illustrator responding to social and cultural change through three decades of British post-war history. Some of this material is collated into *The Scruffy Herberts*, an artists publication appended to this thesis (Appendix Five).

Conclusion

The conclusion details my findings, considers the series of outcomes, how they relate to contemporary fine art and comics-making practice and identifies strands for further research.

Chapter One: Memoir, Collection & Archive

> 'What was it about superheroes that I needed? It was the comfort of continuity in my life that they offered; it was the deathless, ageless characters with whom I was already sharing years of memories. Up to the age of twelve, for better or worse, my strongest memories had to do with comics. This is partially because (unlike a first crush or a family vacation) the memories of reading can be constantly reinforced and relived, easily and vividly. For the legions of ageing readers, what else are serial superhero stories but perpetually running narrative machines-an endless supply of nostalgia?[1]
>
> In England it is believed that to know one's locale thoroughly is to understand the forces of the world or, even, of the universe itself.[2]

I remember the first time I saw a *Perishers* cartoon strip. It was in a book collection of reprints of newspaper strips. The cover prominently featured a glowing yellow and orange bonfire scene and a white text strip on a black ground which stated in capital letters that it was the '10TH CRACKERJACK COLLECTION FROM THAT FAMOUS CARTOON STRIP'. The word 'CRACKERJACK' was written in a wobbly and askew style, with seven white five-pointed cartoon stars of various sizes 'twinkling' around the uneven letters. The visual inference of this wonky text style was that something bizarre and unpredictable could be expected from the book's contents, and the stars suggested dizziness or confusion as if they were swirling round a dazed Bugs Bunny's head. Underneath were the larger words 'The Perishers'. In front of the bonfire danced five silhouetted figures of a large dog, three children and a toddler.

As my mother was with me I am guessing I was ten or eleven years old, it would therefore have been 1972 or 1973, and would probably have been during the long school summer holidays. I am not certain of the year but I know that my parents had already separated after my father's new job abroad for Chrysler had let to a brief and ill-fated family relocation to a suburb of Frankfurt during the Spring of 1972.

Given that this *Perishers* book had been published in 1971 and was possibly two years old, I might have bought it in one of the many second-hand bookshops tucked away among the ribbon of used furniture showrooms, pubs and working-mens' drinking clubs, betting shops and Italian greasy spoon cafes on Seaside, the street set back one block from the row of seafront boarding houses that ran east along the English south coast towards Pevensey Bay from Eastbourne pier. Or it may have been sitting in a newsagents window, one of the nine or ten on alternate sides of Seaside running down to the back of Princes Park, where every Summer it

[1] Howe, *Give Our Regards to the Atomsmashers*, p. viii.
[2] Ackroyd, *Albion The Origins of the English Imagination*, p. 278.

was locally feared the Sussex Gypsies would arrive to park their caravans before hop-picking season. These paper shops had shelves of cards, stationery and sweets, rusting spinner racks of Bamforth's 'Saucy Seaside' postcards and small stacks of American Marvel, DC, Harvey, Charlton, Archie and Gold Key comic books and other British and licenced comics such as *The Hotspur*, *Pippin*, *Playhour*, *Lion and Thunder*, *The Dandy*, *The Beano*, *TV Comic*, *Valiant, Smash!*, *Tiger and Jag*, *Buster and Jet*, *The Hornet*, *The Hotspur*, *Cor!!*, *Knockout*, *Countdown*, *Look and Learn*, *Victor*, *Target*, *Disneyland*, *Sad Sack*, *Laurel & Hardy* and *Look-In Comic*, and alongside magazine racks and shelves of quiz and crossword magazines, Holiday Specials and titles such as *Jackie*, *Bunty*, *Tammy*, *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *New Musical Express*, *Disc & Music Echo*, *Popswop*, *Music Scene*, *Titbits*, *Reveille*, *Disco 45*, *Cracked* and *Mad Magazine*. Or it may have been in the newsagents on Susan's Road running downhill away from the pier which three years later was the only shop in town to stock the larger black and white anthologies published by Curtis Magazines like *Tales of the Zombie*, *Dracula Lives* and *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*. While these genre comics were produced by Marvel Comics, the cover and internal indicia contained no reference to the company as they were trying to avoid any controversy over their decision to ignore Comics Code Authority guidelines banning visual representations of vampires, exorcisms and zombies.[3] The Curtis magazines operated both as a testing ground for would-be comic creators and a strategy to monopolise newsstands, and their pages were filled with the text of English Literature graduates illustrated by numerous Philippine illustrators, the latter employed because they quickly produced attractive and illustrative monochrome artwork and, crucially, could be paid a lower page rate than their North American counterparts.

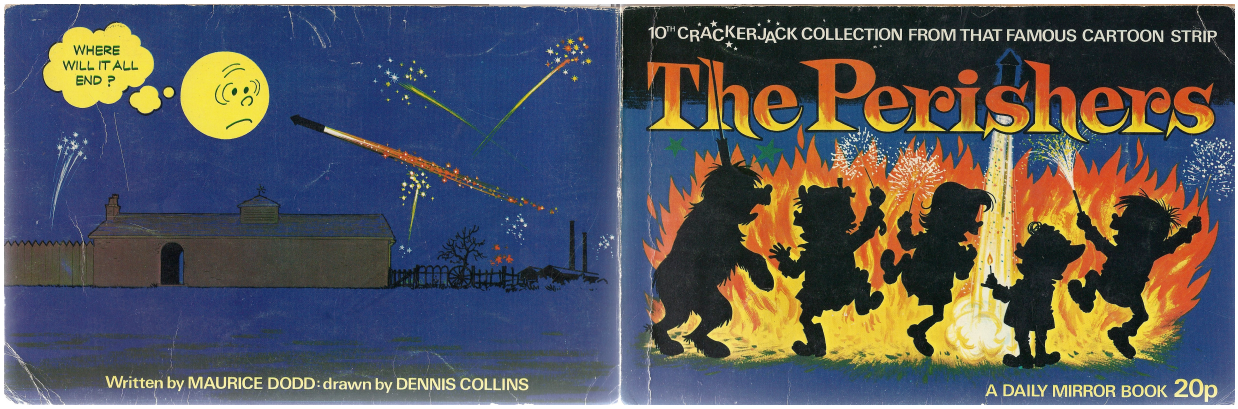

Fig 1.1 *The Perishers Book 10* (cover), pub. Daily Mirror Books 1971

Looking at the 'Fireworks' cover to attempt a form of close reading I am struck by details I have not noticed between then and now. I had always thought Old Boot (the large sheepdog

[3] The 'Comics Code' was set up in the wake of the 'moral panic' following the 'Seduction of the Innocent' US subcommittee hearing in 1954 when Dr Fredric Wertham denounced EC comics so vociferously for their violent and sexual content that the company nearly ceased publication.

character on the far left of the drawing) was deep in conversation with Wellington, the pair of them loudly discussing something, perhaps over the roar of the bonfire. I had also imagined a similarly excited conversation occurring between middle character Maisie and Baby Grumpling next to her, with Marlon isolated on the far right of the picture, either laughing to himself or shouting into the night sky. I see now that a rocket has landed on Old Boot's head and he is crying out in pain, and that Maisie is actually laughing at her guileless younger brother's birthday cake candle, a toddler's approximation of a sparkler. It did occur to me some years ago, when I was making an artist's book called *Wilf – A Life In Pictures*, that I had always seen these silhouetted figures as having their backs to the viewer and facing the fire. I can now look at the image and 'flip' them one way or another, at one moment facing me, the next facing away in a pseudo-'rabbit-duck' perceptual test. On the back cover is a characteristic *Perishers* landscape comprising Wellington's railway station home, a high wooden fence and the suggestion of other distant fireworks parties beyond more decrepit fences, a bare tree, a bicycle wheel, a patch of scrubland and a darkened factory.

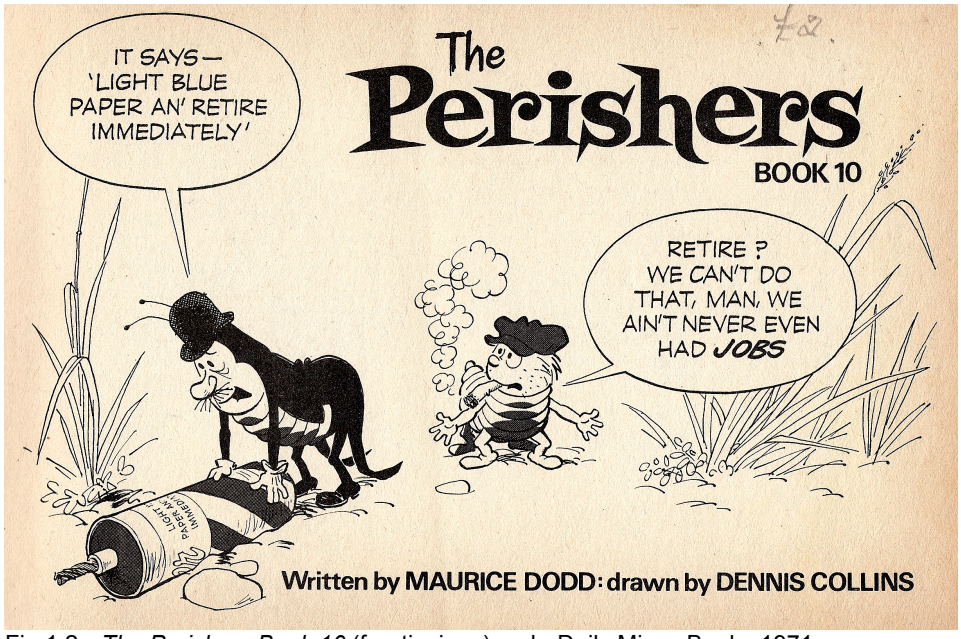

Fig 1.2 *The Perishers Book 10* (frontispiece), pub. Daily Mirror Books 1971

The inside front cover featured a drawing of two talking insects, one a tall beetle wearing a bowler hat and tailcoat examining an unspent firework, and a shorter caterpillar wearing a flat cap and puffing profusely on a human-sized roll-up. Inside the book were reprints of newspaper strips from 1969 and 1970 which I now consider the beginning of the 'Age of Refinement' for *The Perishers*.

Over forty years later I know that the book that preceded my new purchase in the series was *The Perishers Spring Collection – No. 9*. Published earlier in 1971, the cover showed the main

characters' faces as the centres of cartoon sunflowers. The following spring's *The Perishers No. 11* would depict the characters as illustrations on seed packets attached to vegetable garden stakes. Unlike American publications, British comic book covers would often feature this seasonal and cyclic imagery, with the main characters either frolicking in the sea and spitting out sand from their buns, or huddled round a glowing fire with Christmas stockings hanging from the mantelpiece.

When I saw *The Perishers Book 10*, I had already begun to buy, read and *collect* comic books. I was not yet obsessive, but was developing an urge to acquire, consume and own the combination of text and images that comics offered, both as a form, an escape and an assortment of orderable artifacts. I had also started to draw my own cartoons and comic strips, entering a competition run by the 'Times' newspaper aged eight in 1970 with a naïvely terrible science fiction strip proposal, which had won me my first rejection slip. By 1972 this compulsion to buy and order was, with hindsight, what is known as a 'coping mechanism' after my parents' separation in a small German town, driven by the revelation of my father's hitherto-secret girlfriend, and our consequent return to England without him.

My lifetime of comic reading began in 1966 with an issue of a comic called *Pippin*. This featured a comic book adaptation of the TV programme 'The Pogles' which, together with its successor 'Pogles Wood', was a series of 15 minute stop-frame animations detailing the rural adventures of a 'family' comprising elderly couple Amos and Edna Pogle, their son Pippin and an unidentifiable, pixie/cat creature called Tog. The atmosphere was warm, pastoral and bucolic, with opening credits panning across the rolling Kent countryside accompanied by bucolic flute and oboe music.



1.3 Still from *Pogles Wood*, 1966-1968, BBC Films. (l-r, Mr Amos Pogle, Pippin, Mrs Edna Pogle and Tog)

I re-saw the above image for the first time since childhood when I bought a CD reissue of the original music in 2007. It was startlingly nostalgic and I was captivated by the sense of it seeming to be a moment in a journey when, of course, it was a still photograph of motionless puppets. I was also struck by the strangeness of the Tog character and how as a child I had never considered what kind of creature he was. According to a fansite:

> It is a little known fact that Tog was once a stuffed toy, brought to life by magic in a battle to defeat the Witch (who appears in 'The Pogles'). Having been made into a living being, he could not in all fairness be sent back to being a lifeless toy, so he came to live with Amos and Edna Pogle, and spoke English… of sorts.[4]

The issue of *Pippin* was bought for me by my mother. I would have been four, and I remember the shop was not in Seaside but the other, western side of the pier, beyond the nine or ten blocks of wedding cake hotel frontages, at the far end of Compton Street. Here, abutting the back of the elegantly vast Grand Hotel, there was a neat row of reasonably upmarket local shops; a butchers, bakers, greengrocers, cake shop, a ladies' hair salon and a large newsagents cum sweet shop. I realise writing this now that these were the closest shops to where my family then lived, in a newly-built block of flats called 'Mirasol' at 18 Granville Road, where my father maintained a mild, ongoing feud with our neighbour Eric Seldon. The flats were a minute's walk from the beach, just behind South Cliff Tower, a 19-storey block built in 1965 and, so it was rumoured, in which Roger Moore lived, though not as Roger Moore but as his fictional television alter ego 'The Saint'. It was from 'Mirasol' that my first clear and structured memories of childhood emerged; being ill with a fever but requesting that my mother tell me when leather-clad Emma Peel had her weekly martial arts fight on 'The Avengers', hearing and watching the 'haunted nursery'[5] psychedelia of groups like Procol Harum and The Move on 'Top of the Pops', and running home from kindergarten in tears when John Robson put a cardboard box on his head and I thought he had turned into a robot.

I am describing in detail this long thread of emotional and cultural connection as it forms the basis and substance of my own creative practice. My artwork investigates how identity is defined by circumstance, geography and popular culture. The drawings and writing are often presented within both historical and contemporary frameworks, often in relation to comic strips, childrens' illustration and other graphic narrative forms. This compendium of childlike interests and adolescent pursuits is used as a vocabulary with which to communicate complex social

[4] www.pogleswood.org (Accessed 3 August 2014).
[5] The term 'haunted nursery' has been used by writer Alan Moore to describe the peculiarly British strand of psychedelia that took inspiration from such cultural precedents as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Rupert the Bear* and other childhood fantasy stories.

ideas. The influences can be taken from their initial source and set in other eras and locations. In this way the work connects autobiography with contemporary socio-political and cultural occurrences.

From my first copy of *Pippin* my comics reading developed. The first Marvel Comics image that visually impacted on my child's eye was in an issue of *Fantastic* comic published in early 1967 (I later discovered this was a reprint of the first *X-Men* comic originally published in the USA in September 1963). The first (or 'splash') page showed a group of young men in matching uniforms circling around a bald man in an armchair wearing a blanket over his legs. One was flying with large, white wings, one had huge hands and feet and swung ape-like from an oddly chintzy curtain pelmet, and another, who appeared to be made of ice, wearing only buccaneer boots and presumably naked, was spinning with his legs locked around an ice pole. The cover headshots of the X-Men were not, I now realise, drawn by original artist Jack Kirby, but by some uncredited, probably British artist who made the Iceman's features look more like a cloud cluster or a marshmallow.



Fig 1.4 *Fantastic* No. 1, 18th February 1967



Fig 1.5 *X-Men* (pg. 1), from *Fantastic* No. 1, 18th February 1967



Fig 1.6 Iceman (cover detail)

My childhood reading spanned educational comics like *Look and Learn* with its painted biographies of historical figures; *Eagle* with its cutaway diagrams displaying the interior machinery of battleships and airliners; childrens humour and adventure comics like *Whizzer and Chips* and *Smash!*; boys' war comics like my father and older brother's favoured *Hotspur* and the small illustrated novellas from the *Commando* and *War Picture Library* series; and *Desperate Dan* and *The Broons* creator Dudley Watkins' illustrated adaptations of Victorian novels like *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*. One weekend in 1968 on a day out to swim

in the warm waters next to Dungeness power station my father's Saab got stuck on a winding country lane behind an army truck full of young squaddies one of whom was reading a comic. His mates snatched it from him and laughingly held it up for us to see it was a copy of Marvel's *Sergeant Fury and his Howling Commandos*.

As a town designed for leisure and holidays, Eastbourne accumulated an ocean of cultural flotsam and jetsam, particularly along the seafront where London daytrippers, coach parties of northern pensioners and foreign students would visit, wander and stay. Here many temporary shops would open on the mile-long stretch from under the pier and dotted along the seafront to the Wish Tower, the busiest section of the coastline from May to September due to its sandier beaches and proximity to the train station. In an era of a high turnover of pop-cultural trends, these summer newsstands' stock would remain unchanged year on year, brought out at the start of the season and packed away in damp storage for the winter. It was that here years-old comics and magazines could be sourced, on the peeling and salt-rusted shelves and spinner racks.

Eastbourne had a significant elderly population. Any mention of it on TV was invariably as a joke in a sitcom that implied its status as an emblem of a post-war Britain grimly hanging on to a doomed notion of Empire. Most often it was referenced in *Dad's Army* as the family home of Captain Mainwaring. Even as a teenager in the late 1970s my friends and I would go out drinking and it would not be uncommon for the whole pub (apart from us) to break into 'The White Cliffs of Dover' or 'We'll Meet Again' at last orders. As a child the Second World War was anecdotally referenced constantly, as was rationing, air raids, the Blitz and D-Day; even the *Great* War was recalled by people then in their sixties who could have fought in that conflict. As well as being demographically a gerontocracy, topographically Eastbourne was unusual. As well as the experience, when growing up on a coast, that you are only living in half a world as the other half is water, the town was also oddly centre-less as it encircled a large, marshy central plain, so any longish journey required walking around half the town.

Eastbourne, therefore, was a semi-circular conurbation of Regency houses rising up the sides of the Downs to the headlands; a wedding cake display of squares of Victorian hotels along the seafront; scrappy working class homes and B'n'Bs on the 'wrong' side of the pier, and, inland, individual Tudor-bethan houses with large, landscaped and walled grounds encircled by new bungalow estates, small parks and terraced council housing. At the western, genteel edge of the town the coast road wound up to the crest of the hill and the chalk cliffs of Beachy Head, which was and remains a popular tourist destination and infamous suicide spot. In 1971 there was a competition in one of my regular comic purchases which required identifying the

publication's representative who would be walking along the promenade. My mother took me down to the seafront to take part and I won by seconds, beating a fellow Meads Infants pupil to the prize. With my new pound note I bought my first Tintin book *The Black Island* for 52½p. I didn't know much about Tintin other than noticing the books on display in the bookshop. They were (unusually) hard-backed and taller and thinner (in an oddly 'foreign' looking way) than the standard comic book annual. When I got home I began to read the book. The first panel of the first page depicted a smiling young man walking through the countryside dressed in a lightweight raincoat, brown plus four trousers and white socks. At his side a small white dog jumped through the air chasing a red butterfly. As comic artist Chris Ware has said of his initial impression of Tintin:

> I found it kind of uncomfortable; I was like, 'Is he a superhero? Is he a kid? And why is he hanging around with this bearded guy?' It was really creepy, but I liked the clarity of the drawing. I felt like I'd already seen it somehow, it had a sense of familiarity to it that I didn't really understand. I still don't, other than I think it reflects the way we reduce things when we think about the world.[6]

The 'clarity' Ware mentions is the 'ligne claire' or 'clear line'[7] style that Hergé developed where people and objects are drawn in a single, undistinguished line thickness with no superfluous shading, hatching or rendering.

The Black Island had first been published in serial form in 1937, and Hergé took influence from Hitchcock's 1935 film adaptation of John Buchan's 1915 novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. However, where the film begins in Galloway, south-western Scotland, and ends in Kent, *The Black Island* begins its British-set part in Dover and ends in a castle off the Scottish mainland. The unlikely deployment of a gorilla at the climax echoes 1933's 'King Kong' film.

In 1943 Hergé modified the book's artwork and coloured it for republication. It was upgraded again in 1966 for British publication in order to correct narrative and visual inaccuracies when perfectionist Hergé sent his assistant Bob de Moor from Brussels to England. De Moor arrived in Dover by Channel ferry, travelling west and north while compiling drawn and photographic reference material which was subsequently included in the new version. It was this edition that I bought from the bookshop at the top of Grove Road in front of Eastbourne Town Hall, a mile equidistant from both the pier and the coast road that climbed to Beachy Head. As I continued reading, Tintin is shot, hospitalised, questioned by two apparently British detectives, leaves hospital and catches a ferry to Dover. There, as he notes, 'a train from there will get me to Littlegate at ten past five. Then I'll take a taxi from Eastdown to Littlegate Station.' The taxi

[6] http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/11/chris-ware-graphic-novelist-interview (Accessed 17 October 2016).
[7] 'Ligne clair' was a term coined by Belgian cartoonist Joost Swarte.

drives Tintin along winding country roads until ambushed by criminals who knock the driver unconscious and lead Tintin to the edge of a coastal cliff that I immediately recognised as Beachy Head.

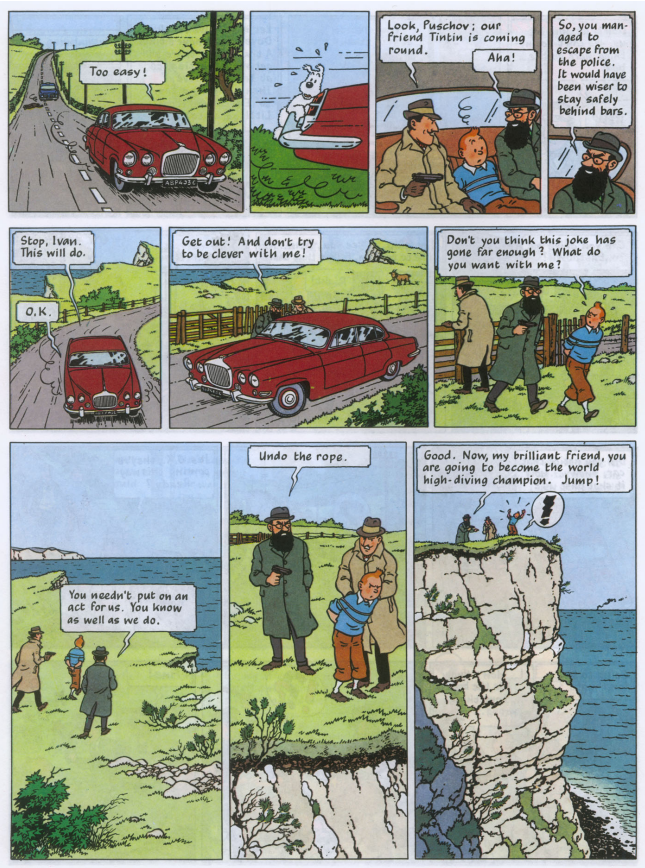

Fig 1.7 *The Adventures of Tintin: The Black Island* , Hergé, p. 8, pub. 1966

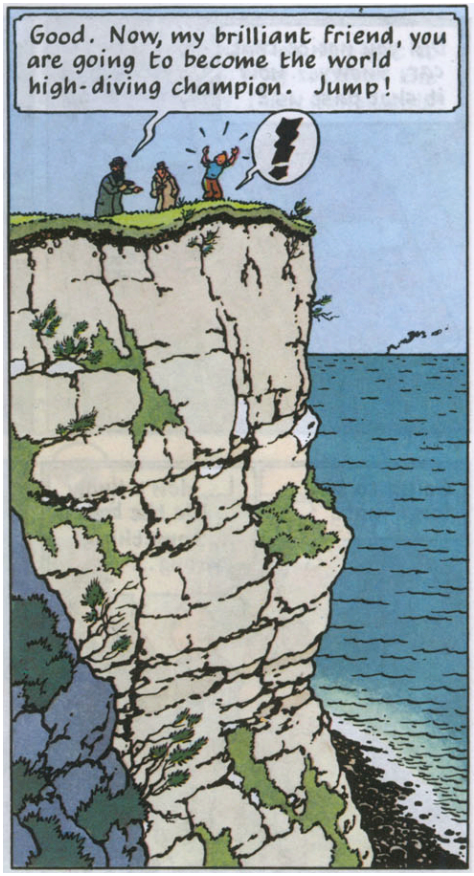

Fig 1.8 *The Black Island* (detail), p. 8 pub. 1966

There are moments in reading when the written world and the actual world overlap. Seeing a cliff I had known all my short life in that book, a cliff I was at that moment a mile away from, the two images, one pictorial and one experiential, collapsed into one another. Francis Spufford has written that 'when a fiction does trip a profound recognition … the reward is more than an inert item of knowledge. The book becomes part of the history of our self understanding,'[8] and goes on to state that 'the association between books for children and autonomy for children is very strong'.[9]

I read further into the book, deriving autonomy from the absorption of visual information, seeing my hometown encoded in the clear lines and elegant colours of the book, recognising trees, paths, clumps of South Downs grass and Sussex street signs. As Hergé biographer Michael Farr describes Tintin's journey, 'the village he passes on his return to Muller's gutted mansion

[8] Spufford, *The Child That Books Built*, p. 8.
[9] Spufford, *The Child That Books Built,* p. 9.

has acquired a picture postcard Elizabethan thatched cottage'[10] (a building I felt I recognised as Old Town's Lamb Inn) and, further on Farr notes that 'with its typical Gothic church towers, the station town – built up in De Moor's reworking – is quintessentially English.'[11] Although supposedly based on Bishop's Stortford, the drawn railway station,[12] with its staircases over the platforms, seemed identical to Lewes Station, a few miles out of Eastbourne on the way to London.

After reading *The Black Island* I collected the rest of the Tintin books, always searching the backgrounds of panels for other familiar landmarks. I never found any, not knowing then that *The Black Island* was the only British-set book, but the sense of Tintin's world was always anchored to that initial recognition of Beachy Head. Each time I read a new book and Tintin walked along a street in the evening, or stopped at a newsstand, or was driven to a new locale, I experienced a sense of extra anticipation beyond the suspense being generated within the narrative, a sense of the real world potential imprinted within the images and pages. Very occasionally it came close to occurring, as at the beginning of *The Red Sea Sharks* when Tintin and Captain Haddock are seen leaving a cinema and walking down a street which at age ten I thought *could* be London's Regent Street which I had walked down when taken to Hamleys on a Christmas shopping outing.

I first encountered the monthly *Mad* Magazine proper in 1972. Not long after discovering Tintin I had begun to collect the *Mad* Signet paperback editions which anthologised the earliest issues of the comic book first published from 1952-56. I had noticed *Mad* at the large W H Smith newsstand on the concourse of Eastbourne's terminal train station, one which still features in dreams where I discover a stack of never-seen-before comic books. It was by the station that I changed buses on my way home from my primary school to the housing estate where I lived, and where every Thursday afternoon I bought the A5 two-colour pop lyric songbook *Disco 45* and the girls' comic *Jackie*. I always affected the air of a very busy person who had been deputised into buying *Jackie* for an older sister who I didn't actually have.

[10] Farr, *Tintin – The Complete Companion*, p. 77.
[11] Farr, *Tintin – The Complete Companion*, p. 77.
[12] Farr, *Tintin – The Complete Companion*, p. 77.



Fig 1.9 *Mad Magazine* No.137, pub. c. July 1973

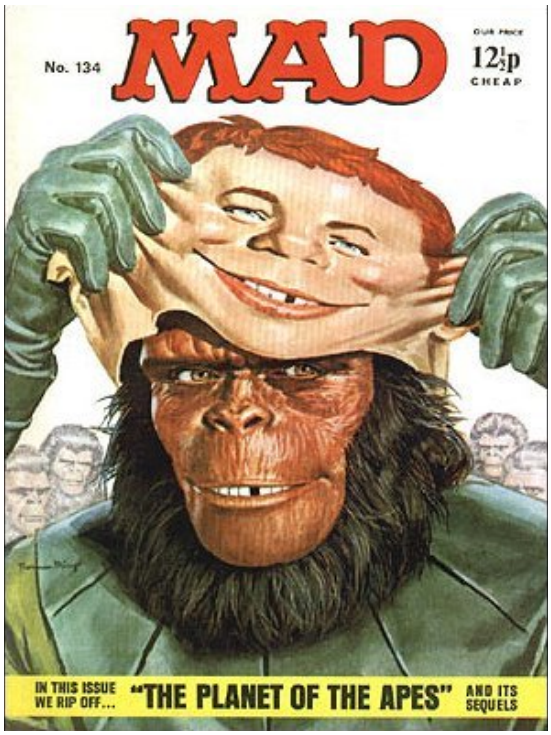

Fig 1.10 *Mad* No. 134, pub. c. Mar 1973

By this time *Mad* had, to many of its first generations of readers, become formulaic and as much of a staid symbol of mainstream America as the media it had once satirised. The magazine was gently lampooning current films like The Godfather (or 'The Odd Father'), A Clockwork Orange ('A Crockwork Lemon') and Planet Of The Apes ('The Planet That Went Ape'). The covers always featured *'*mascot' Alfred E Neuman, a gap-toothed ginger boy whose personality seemed a combination of knowing guile and backwoods idiocy. These paintings parodied the film posters or TV series casts with Neuman intruding into the image by adopting the persona of a film or programme's character. Often these pastiches were of AA or X-rated films which I was too young to see; therefore the *Mad* material seemed somehow covert and forbidden.

In 1973 I met a fellow second-year grammar school boy called Caspar. We were both queuing in a school corridor for a double-period Religious Education lesson when another pupil mentioned that one of us read American Marvel comics. We became best friends. Caspar lived with his family in a large, rented house about a mile closer to the town centre than me and caught the bus to school which passed through Grand Parade, a strip of run-down shops serving nearby housing estates. On the far right hand side of the street heading out of town to the London road was The Osprey, a narrow newsagents with a small countertop of piles of newspapers. Instead of the usual wire spinner rack the magazines, puzzle and comic books were displayed vertically on a wooden shelf beneath the newspaper counter. Most of the shelf was empty for periods of three weeks and a few days but once a month a large consignment of

about 40-50 American Marvel comic books arrived and were put on display. On the morning of a new delivery Caspar could see the colourful line of new comics from the bus upstairs window. Every morning when I saw Caspar at the school gates, when I still attended school regularly, from a distance he would nod or shake his head to denote whether the comics had arrived. On that day hours would be spent waiting for lessons to end when we would run along Kings Drive past the District General Hospital, up the steep incline of Rodmill Drive (or 'The Rodmill' as it was unnecessarily grandly known), down Eldon Road past the girls' high school and along Victoria Drive to The Osprey. 'Run' because there would usually be only one issue of each title to buy and, once missed, the shop would not restock. I would buy every available title. For example, and from memory: *Thor*, *The Avengers*, *The Amazing Spider-man*, *Fantastic Four*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Astonishing Tales featuring Ka-Zar*, *Iron Man*, *Amazing Adventures featuring Killraven*, *Tomb of Dracula*, *Daredevil*, *Captain America & The Falcon*, *Luke Cage Power Man*, *Werewolf by Night*, *The Frankenstein Monster*, *The Defenders*, *Marvel Team-Up* and *Marvel Spotlight*, the last featuring material taken from the inventory drawers at the Marvel Comics office at 625 Madison Avenue, an address that achieved iconic status in my adolescent consciousness when detailed in plan form by cartoonist Marie Severin on the cover of issue no.16 of Marvel's own in-house fanzine *FOOM*.[13]



Fig 1.11 *Foom* ♯16 (cover), Marie Severin, pub. 1976

[13] FOOM the acronym stood for 'Friends of Ol' Marvel', the dropped 'd' from 'Old' intended to convey a folksy, familiar sensibility.

This single drawing obsessed me as a blueprint of a potential adult community, an escape to a utopian space where the making and production of comics books was an option and a vocation. As Geoff Dyer has noted, 'one of the reasons Marvel had an edge over its rival, DC, was the way that its brand of superheroics did not take place in a fantasy vacuum but in the turbulent here and now of American life.'[14] Looking at the *FOOM* cover, it was possible to believe that this was a two-way process, and that to attain the level of a drawn person, a caricature in the corridors of the Marvel offices, was almost like entering the printed world of superheroes.[15]

Every Saturday I would meet Caspar at Eastbourne Station and we would walk the length of Seaside to the edge of the town visiting each newsagent in turn. There were around 10-15 which stocked American comic books. As the Osprey was our primary source of Marvel Comics, the aim was to pick up any interesting comic books published by the (to us) 'secondary' comics companies such as DC, Charlton, Gold Key and the short-lived Atlas. I see this now as an adolescent form of psychogeographical dérive as outlined by Guy Debord in 1956.[16] The generally necessary constituents for this process were all fulfilled by our expeditions. It was urban, and unknown, inasmuch as the 'other side of town' is unknown to an adolescent. It was relatively hostile, the Seaside area not being within our own school's economic or social catchment area. It was driven by chance, this being a time before distribution dates were known to the newsagent. This 'drifting' would include spontaneous diversions along the beach, random decisions to explore second-hand bookshops, junk shops and anywhere else that might contain comic books. Forty years later these spaces still recur in my dreams, usually fully-stocked with non-existent masterworks.

The rest of the weekend would be spent reading, absorbing and memorising the names of the writers, artists and inkers, plot points, and assorted ephemera for future reference. The critical aspect to this activity was its currency. Unlike library books or school texts, these were immediate artefacts; they had been written and drawn weeks, or days, before I was holding them. As with my parallel obsession with pop music, the appeal of comics books and newspaper strips was their freshly-minted 'now-ness'.

From 1973 through to 1976 Caspar and I would spend evenings, weekends and school holidays at my sitting room's small dining table (a circular drop-leaf polished and barley-twist legged donation from 'War on Want' after being made homeless by my parents' divorce). We

[14] Dyer, 'Comics In A Man's Life', from *Give Our Regards to the Atomsmashers*, p. 37.
[15] In recent years I have discovered that the drawing is a fantasy; that actually many writers and artists depicted never visited the offices and never met.
[16] Debord, Theory of the Dèrive, from 'Les Lèvres Nues', *Internationale Situationniste #2*, 1958. http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html (Accessed 17 December 2015).

would invent characters and write scripts, draw comic books and create characters that inevitably imitated drawing styles, themes or genres. Caspar's preferences were fantasy and barbarians, perhaps drawing on his parents' Welsh upbringing and interest in Celtic myth, the uncanny and the paranormal. His mother had dreams, the imagery of which psychically foretold the names of horse race winners which she then placed bets on. His father was a professional illustrator for *Doctor Who* comics. We would nervously go into his studio room when we knew he was in the pub to examine the page he would be working on, or to open the drawers of his 'swipe file' to look at reference photographs of naked women torn from naturist magazines like *Health & Efficiency*.

Throughout all this time I was buying every Marvel comic, some DC and Charlton comics, *Mad* Magazine, cartoon collections of *The Perishers*, *Peanuts*, *Andy Capp* and *Gambols* strips, and sending off postal orders for fanzines, underground comics and trade magazines. I spent most of my time cataloguing, ordering, re-ordering, reading and re-reading my comics collection. This left no time to go to school and I would fake illness, play truant or leave school at breaktimes to continue this process.

In fact this intense production to make comics to our self-imposed deadlines, trading of duties on each others' schedules, and other collecting and cataloguing marked the beginning of the long end of our devotion to Marvel Comics, which was about to move towards what would become known to fandom as the 'Iron Age'. As writer Alan Moore has noted, 'the 1970s, though starting optimistically … would rapidly deteriorate into one of the least-inspired and most drearily moribund decades in comics history, at least as far as mainstream comics in America would be concerned.'[17]

Caspar and I had passed the period of intense identification with comics which spans the ages of 11-14. One Sunday lunchtime in 1976 we were walking down Albert Parade when Caspar asked if I had seen the recent London Weekend Television documentary about a new London-based band called The Sex Pistols who believed in 'anarchy'. This initially shocked my 'Daily Mail'-reading, *Peanuts*-loving, Genesis-listening sensibilities, but a morbid, disapproving interest quickly mutated into intense excitement. The last *Perishers* book I bought was No. 20 in early 1978, with a cover showing the characters escaping the school gates, hats and satchels flung into the air and racing towards the reader, just at the point where I was taking O'Levels and completing mandatory education. I still followed comics to a small extent, but I was also reading Kafka and Camus, listening to The Fall and Joy Division, buying the *New Musical Express* every week and absorbing its recommendations of writers such as J.G.

[17] Moore, 'Buster Brown at the Barricades', *Occupy Comics* No. 3, pub June 2013

Ballard, William Burroughs and Jacques Derrida and artists and filmmakers such as Andy Warhol, Nicolas Roeg and Werner Herzog. As writer Mark Fisher has noted, 'the NME constituted a kind of informal-education system, in which theory acquired a strange, lustrous glamour.'[18]

This lexicon of more serious literature and imagery replaced comics buying and collection for over a decade, at which point I began to re-connect with comics as an interest and inspiration, and the influences of cultural properties cited in this chapter would become reference points and source material for future art works.

[18] Fisher, *Ghosts of my Life*, p. 17.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Critical Context

2.1 Literature Review

In undertaking this PhD research I was amazed by the scant amount of written or visual information on the history of British newspaper comics. Such material as exists is usually scattered across larger histories of comics that focus principally on comic books rather than content generated for daily newspapers. Within this small amount of material *The Perishers* is rarely referenced or acknowledged. Even these brief entries generally only note the dates of the strip's existence, the names of creators and characters, and the observation that it was conceived of as a British equivalent of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*. *The Perishers* gains specific citations in the following surveys or reference books:

The Penguin Book of Comics (1971) by George Perry & Alan Aldridge (37 words)
Stap Me! The History of the British Newspaper Comic Strip (1971) by Denis Gifford (8 words)
The World Encyclopedia of Comics (1976) ed. Maurice Horn, *The Perishers* section (329 words) by Denis Gifford
Read All About It: 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror (2003) by Bill Hagerty (81 words)
Great British Comics (2006) by Paul Gravett (103 words)

This amounts to a few hundred words published about a 'Daily Mirror' newspaper strip that ran uninterrupted for nearly 50 years and which at its peak had a daily readership of 14 million people. The second half of the strip's history from 1987 onwards after artist Dennis Collins' retirement is barely referenced at all. This circumstance is true of other contemporaneous 'Daily Mirror' strips such as *Buck Ryan*, *The Flutters* and *Romeo Brown*. The notable exceptions are *Andy Capp* and *Jane* which were more popularly acknowledged, spun off into other media and had books published on the characters and their creators. For the most part, though, many British newspaper strips have escaped any significant historical consideration, republishing or critical appraisal.

In contrast, America had by the 1960s begun to establish a critical language to examine the content of newspaper strips. This had been developing in stages from the 1920s, when essayists had begun to address their overlooked social or cultural value. Critic Gilbert Seldes, stated in 1924 that

> [T]he comic strip is an exceptionally supple medium, giving play to a variety of talents, to the use of many methods, and it adapts itself to almost any theme. The enormous circulation it achieves imposes certain

> limitations: it cannot be too local, since it is syndicated throughout the country; it must avoid political and social questions because the same strip appears in papers of divergent editorial opinions; there is no room in it for acute racial caricature, although no group is immune from its mockery. These and other restrictions have gradually made of the comic strip a changing picture of the average American life-and by compensation it provides us with the freest American fantasy.[1]

This definition outlines the unique set of editorial and distributional circumstances that defined American newspaper comics of the time; that they were bound by their popularity and accessibility not to be politically partisan or prejudiced, and they could satirise but not be prejudiced. These definitions are inevitably stated within the context of their times. In fact, there was racial stereotyping in many comic strips and certain cartoonists expressed polarized political perspectives. *Li'l Abner* creator Al Capp and *Little Orphan Annie* author Harold Gray were both right wing libertarians, and *Pogo* creator Walt Kelly later addressed political corruption and environmental issues, but broadly speaking the foundational thinking around newspaper strips was that a mass audience came to them with expectations of universality, inclusivity and a principle of egalitarianism.

The first books to commence a critical consideration of comics and newspaper strips were Martin Sheridan's *Comics and their Creators* (1942) and Coulton Waugh's *The Comics* (1947) which, in the absence of reprint collections, was researched by examining the original newspapers in the New York Public Library. In 1974 Jerry Robinson wrote *The Comics: An Illustrated History of Comics Art*, significant as the author was a practicing comic book artist. In 1976 Maurice Horn edited *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* which became a standard reference work on global comics production. The following year Bill Blackbeard & Martin Williams co-edited *The Smithsonian Book of Newspaper Comics* which became a key reference text for many current comics artists including Chris Ware, Seth and Daniel Clowes. Blackbeard also republished many significant newspaper strips and established the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Library. Other notable texts are David Kunzle's *The Early Comic Strip* (1974), Ron Goulart's *The Funnies* (1987), M Thomas Inge's *Comics as Culture* (1990) and Robert C Harvey's *The Art of the Funnies* (1994). Various magazines have reprinted newspaper strip runs, including 'The Menomonee Falls Guardian' in the 1970s, 'Nemo Classic Comics Library' in the 1980s and 'Hogan's Alley' in the 1990s, and recently book publishers such as Fantagraphics and IDW Publishing.

Since the early 1990s there has also been a significant upsurge in comics analysis across various forms, from fictionalised histories such as Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Klay* (2000) and Jonathan Lethem's *Fortress of Solitude* (2003) and collections of

[1] Seldes, Gilbert, from '*The Seven Lively Arts'*, reprinted in *A Comics Studies Reader*, p. 46.

memoiristic journalism like *Give Our Regards to the Atomsmashers* (2003). There have also been illustrated analyses by practitioners like Will Eisner's *Comics & Sequential Art* (1985) and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) and examinations of specific publishers such as Gerald Jones' history of DC Comics *Men of Tomorrow* (2004) and Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics – The Untold Story* (2012). There are also extensive interviews with current practitioners in Todd Hignite's *In The Studio* (2007) and Hilary L Chute's *Outside The Box* (2014), and collections of criticism such as *Arguing Comics* (2005), *The Language of Comics* (2007) and *A Comics Studies Reader* (2008) edited by theorists Jeet Heer, Kent Worcester and Thierry Groensteen. This critical focus runs parallel to an expansion in original graphic novel publishing, mainstream and independent film adaptations of comics properties and retrospective exhibitions and gallery shows of active cartoonists.

Where American comics criticism has been driven by the continuing currency of its social and political content, historically British comics culture has been examined through the prism of nostalgia, often expressly with a relationship to childhood, schooldays or holidays. This is mainly due to the narrative content, which revolved around wholesome childrens' adventures in the tradition of Enid Blyton and Arthur Ransome or schoolboy pranks in the style of *Billy Bunter*. The visual style of the British content is also specifically different, with domestic comics mining the Victorian tradition of cartoonists Tom Browne and Phil May and rough-edged 'penny dreadful' imagery rather than the American 'bigfoot' and 'funny animal' styles or heroic illustrators like Burne Hogarth and Hal Foster.

A post-war British examination of comics culture began with George Perry & Alan Aldridge's *Penguin Book of Comics* (1967) which was a general appreciation rather than an analysis. Subsequently there has been an equivalent coffee-table volume every few years, from Reinhold Reitberger & Wolfgang Fuchs' *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium* (1972), Denis Gifford's *International Book of Comics* (1990), Roger Sabin's *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels* (1996) and Paul Gravett's *Great British Comics* (2006) and *Comics Art* (2013). A serious critical language began to develop in the early 1980s and emerged out of a 'cultural studies' model as writers like Martin Barker, David Huxley and Sabin examined the socio-political context of British comics relative to but as distinct from American models. These analyses covered such topics as the British horror comics backlash, the development of domestic underground comics and other comics aimed specifically at adults. Gravett continues to produce critically considered surveys that contextualize British comics culture within a global context. Generally, though, newspaper strip culture has rarely been considered relative to American comics criticism.

My research therefore necessitated recapitulating the transatlantic model to establish an enquiry into British newspaper comic strip history. The first stage was to gather all relevant available material beyond the aforementioned surveys. I collated all existing 39 *Perishers* book collections published from 1963-1990 which reprinted most of the strips up until 1989. The earliest years of *The Perishers* from 1959 to 1962 were not anthologized completely or chronologically in the reprint book collections. As each newspaper strip has a code reference of a letter and number so that the same strips are not accidentally reprinted, I also downloaded the 1,000-odd uncollected Dodd/Collins *Perishers* strips from the British Newspaper Library online archive and integrated them chronologically. I made a spreadsheet that logged the code, the book each strip was reprinted in or whether it existed as a digital file. This formed a structure to enable the reading the whole *Perishers* history in a chronological timeline and as a complete artifact. I also obtained other supporting and anecdotal material around the strip such as annuals and gift books and also acquired books reprints of other 'Daily Mirror' strips. The intention was to create a resource of reference material across the 50-year publishing history of *The Perishers*.

2.2 Critical Context

The Perishers was editorially conceived of as a domestic version of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*, which had begun in 1950 and quickly become the most popular newspaper strip in America. To examine the development of *The Perishers* as inspired by, borrowing from or copying *Peanuts*, I traced other historical precedents of appropriation or pastiche within comics culture. The purpose of these instances varied; sometimes they were homages to other strips, and sometimes they were satires of other cartoonists and their narrative styles or visual tropes. My intention was to build a timeline of these instances of self-reflexivity specifically relevant to newspaper comics themselves or examples in other forms that adopted the structure of newspaper comics to re-examine them within their own framework. These precedents are predominantly American and form a historical critique of comics production for which there is no British equivalent.

This adoption of a transatlantic model to examine how this process of creative displacement conditions the source material and produces new work is analogous to my own working method, where I reconsider personal influences and inspirations to create work that reflects on the intentions and content of the source. This conceptual approach draws on parody and pastiche as processes to creatively consider other artworks and cultural properties.

Newspaper Comics Pastiche In America

A key initial example of parody in American comics history would be the strip-within-a-strip *Fearless Fosdick* which appeared in cartoonist Al Capp's newspaper strip *Li'l Abner* from 1942. The character of detective Fosdick was a satire of Chester Gould's private eye newspaper strip *Dick Tracy*. Although such pastiches had been part of newspaper strips since the turn of the century, Capp took the idea one stage further and had *Dick Tracy* creator Gould also appear in the pastiche as cartoonist 'Lester Gooch'. Adding further to this meta-narrative, In 1947 cartoonist Will Eisner lampooned both *Li'l Abner* and *Dick Tracy* in the story 'Li'l Adam, The Stupid Mountain Boy', parodically representing the two cartoonists as 'Al Slapp' and 'Hector Ghoul' in his newspaper strip *The Spirit*.

This attenuated parodic approach, where the world of the cartoonist leaked into that of their fictional creations, was a clear influence on cartoonist Harvey Kurtzman who conceived of and edited EC Comics' *Mad* and *Panic* comics in the early 1950s. Many writers and artists cite their first encounter with *Mad* Magazine as a visceral formative experience. Alan Moore has noted that *Mad* is 'perhaps the greatest single title that the comics business, or indeed the comics medium, has ever witnessed.'[2] Underground cartoonist Robert Crumb has stated that 'If you were growing up lonely and isolated in a small town, *Mad* was a revelation. Nothing I read anywhere else suggested that there was any absurdity in the culture. *Mad* was like a shock, breaking you out.'[3] Poet Patti Smith put it more directly; 'After *Mad*, drugs were nothing.'[4] Comic artist and creator of graphic novel *Maus* Art Spiegelman elaborated that

> *Mad* really shaped me. The [May 1954] cover of *Mad*, which was drawn by Basil Wolverton, but planned by Harvey Kurtzman, was a really remarkable thing at the time - ten cent comics, comics in great disrepute, imitating the most authoritative voice of the culture at the time, *Life* magazine, combining a drawing and a photo. It really was making something new … for a generation it offered a kind of ironic distance to the surrounding culture. It was like penicillin, to be able to not get overwhelmed by it, and that lasted for a couple of generations, as a useful way of holding the world at enough of a distance to look at and analyse it.[5]

[2] Moore, 'Buster Brown at the Barricades', *Occupy Comics* Nos. 1-3, May-Aug 2013.
[3] Crumb, interview in *Washington Post*, Oct. 22, 2002.
[4] Reidelbach, *Completely Mad*, p. 123.
[5] Chute, *Outside the Box*, p. 249-251.

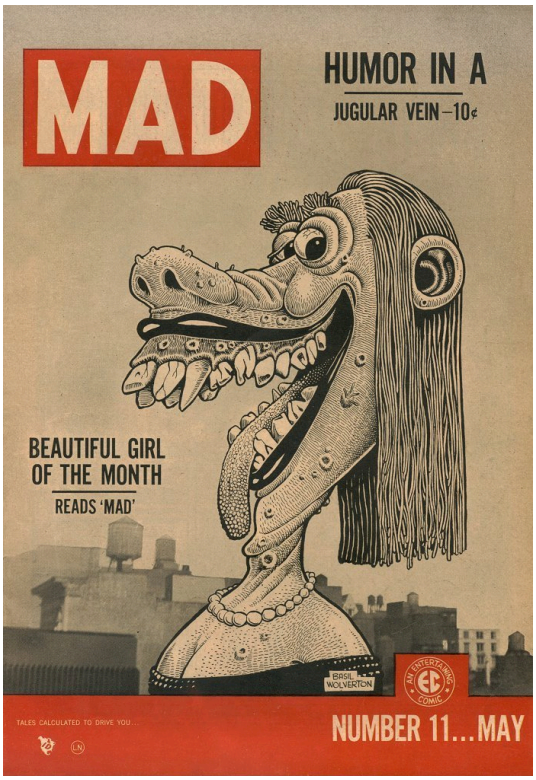

Fig 2.1 *Mad* No. 11 (cover), Basil Wolverton, pub. May 1954

From *Mad*'s first issue in 1952 the fundamental verbal and visual languages of conventional comics narrative are tested; sound effects shake the panel corners loose from where they have been pasted on to the page, the forms of block text sound effects throw shadows onto each other, and the languages of other media such as TV, cinema and newspaper comics are pastiched in comic books for the first time. *Mad* and *Panic's* newspaper strip parodies were mostly drawn by Will Elder and Wally Wood as the specialists in mimicking the technique and visual tone of other artists. These pastiches would also address the original writers' and artists' intentions as well as the narrative and visual content of the strips. Kurtzman summarised his approach:

> The style I developed for *Mad* was necessarily thoughtful under the rowdy surface. Satire and parody work best when what you're talking about is accurately targeted; or, to put it another way, satire and parody work only when you reveal a fundamental flaw or untruth in your subject … the satirist/parodist tries not just to entertain his audience, but to remind it of what the real world is like.[6]

For example, the story 'Murder The Husband'/'Murder The Story' comprises two separate three-page stories; the first partly reprints an EC horror story,[7] and then the second version reprints the same artwork with the original text amended, rewritten, translated and mistranslated into other languages. As the introductory 'blurb' to the second version explains,

[6] Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels*, p. 38.
[7] Originally in *Crime Suspenstories* 12, pub. Aug 1952.

> We trust you enjoyed the first version and now for the second version which is *Mad*'s version of the first version … the Mad version being like the first version … 3 pages for the first version and 3 pages for the Mad version … that is … three pages per version! … And that's what this story is … Perversion![8]

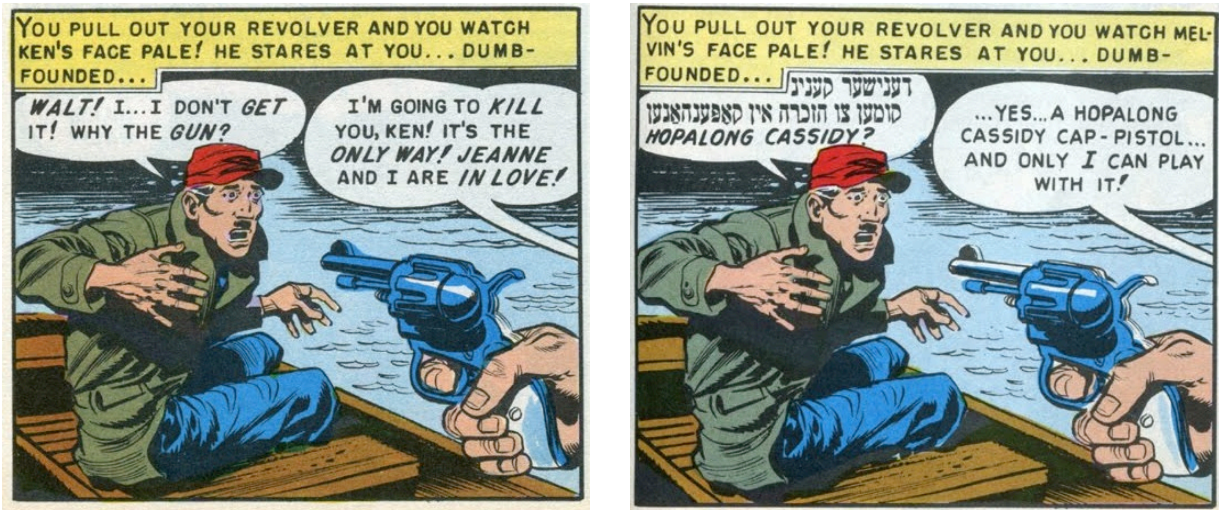

Fig 2.2 'Murder The Husband/'Murder The Story', Al Feldstein/Harvey Kurtzman & Jack Davis, *Mad* No. 11, pub. May 1954

The resultant 'perversion' fractures the original narrative, making it nonsensical and ludicrous. Denis Kitchen and Paul Buhle have noted that this story

> Not only foreshadows the deconstruction of the comics form in the artwork of the 1980s-90s, it also presents a deconstructive theory of popular art as complete as any pop art work would manage in the decades ahead (albeit sans the gallery setting that gave Andy Warhol's canvases their avant-garde flavor and collectors' prestige.[9]

This montage approach could be said to presage the notions of postmodern 'appropriation' or a situationist 'dérive' which is 'a mode of experimental behavior … a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances.'[10] In this instance the narrative shift through linguistic styles and actual languages creates the 'varied ambiances' of absurd humour and heightened melodrama.

Despite differences of intent, formal approaches within comics and fine art would sometimes overlap. A case in point would be *Panic* No. 5 (1954) which features 'Tick Dracy', an Elder parody of *Dick Tracy*. The same year, West Coast collage artist Jess Collins began a series of collages called *Tricky Cad* which he returned to throughout the 1950s. The title of the series was also an anagram of 'Dick Tracy', and later works use other arrangements of the letters. The speech balloons and text captions from Gould's newspaper strips are cut-up and re-edited

[8] *Mad* Comic No. 11.
[9] Kitchen & Buhle, *The Art of Harvey Kurtzman*, p. 106.
[10] Debord, *Situationist Internationelle* No. 2, 1958

but, as well as a formal investigation, Collins' intention as a gay man was to metaphorically express suppressed desire in an era when homosexuality was still illegal.



Fig 2.3 *Tricky Cad Case V* (detail), Jess Collins, 1958, Newspaper, cellulose acetate film, black tape, fabric, and paper on paperboard, 34 x 63cm

Mad Comic No. 22 is entitled the 'Special Art Issue' issue and adopts the form of an artist's biography, in this instance documenting Will Elder's fictional artistic biography in five stages from cradle to grave. The entire issue comprises photo-collages, often decorated with red and blue splashes in a pseudo-abstract style, others referencing the approaches of Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso and Eadweard Muybridge.

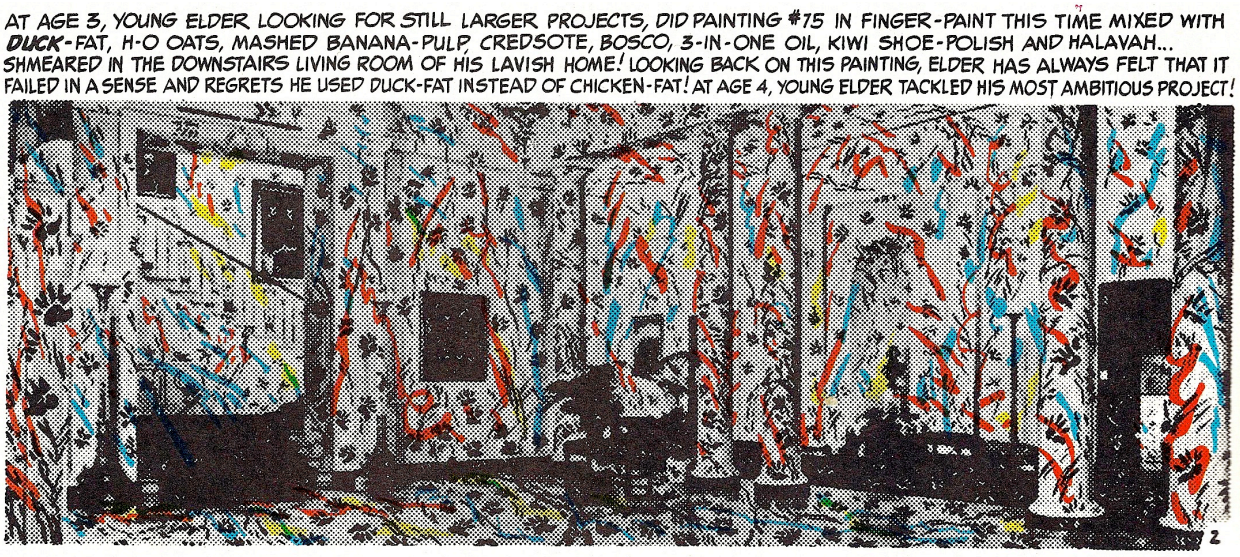

Fig 2.4 *Mad* No. 5 ('Special Art Issue') pg. 3, Harvey Kurtzman & Will Elder, pub. April 1955

The influence of these Dadaist and collagist pastiches has a commonality with British Pop Art, particularly the early work of Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton and the Independent Group. As noted by writer John-Paul Stonard, copies of *Mad* had been sent to Hamilton from the USA in 1955 when it was still unavailable in Britain and just prior to the creation of his seminal photo-collage 'Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?.' Hamilton had

discussed them as a source and influence in correspondence during the preparation of the Whitechapel exhibition 'This Is Tomorrow'.[11]

As well as comic strips, the back covers of *Mad* directly mimicked extant advertising campaigns that would prefigure creative strategies such as 'culture jamming' and the work of groups like Adbusters. As Spiegelman observes,

> What Kurtzman did was he offered an antidote to the bland American 1950s. So we have Norman Rockwell subverted by Kurtzman working with Will Elder into a boozing family with beer in the fishbowl, the dog sipping beer, the baby being fed beer, just a slice of American life.'[12]



Fig 2.5 'Beer Belongs', Douglas Crockwell, advert for United States Brewers foundation, c.1950s[13]



Fig 2.6 'Visiting the Grandparents', Will Elder, *Mad* No. 27, pub. April 1956

The images Spiegelman refers to were made for the United States Brewery Company and were actually by Douglass Crockwell, a homophonically-named contemporary of Rockwell.[14] Crockwell's advertising campaign paintings showed smiling American families enjoying Sundays, public holidays and parties lubricated by cold, foaming glasses of beer. Elder's pastiche takes that template and warps it through the prism of extreme drunkenness. Crockwell's rose-tinted suburbia and warm, familial exchanges are replaced with rictus grins of solipsistic inebriation, the colours starker, the texture of the image crawling and hallucinatory. In

[11] Stonard, 'Pop in the Age of Boom: Richard Hamilton's 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing' p. 612.
[12] Chute, *Outside the Box*, p. 251.
[13] http://milkypinkyway.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/home-life-in-america-in-40s-old.html (Accessed 23 August 2015).
[14] http://buttes-chaumont.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/douglass-crockwells-double-life.html (Accessed 23 August 2015).

Elder's satire even the pet parrot is dishevelled and apparently in the grip of delirium tremens. *Mad*'s collaging of different visual languages, as with the Wolverton cover, or Elder's technically precise visual deconstructions of the American suburban lifestyle were summarised by Marshall McLuhan in 1964:

> Today our ten year olds, in voting for *Mad*, are telling us in their own way that the TV image has ended the consumer phase of American culture. They are now telling us what the eighteen-year old beatniks were first trying to say ten years ago. The pictorial consumer age is dead. The iconic age is upon us. ... *Mad* is a kind of newspaper mosaic of the ad as entertainment, and entertainment as a form of madness. Above all, it is a print- and woodcut-form of expression and experience whose sudden appeal is a sure index of deep changes in our culture. Our need now is to understand the formal character of print, comic and cartoon, both as challenging and changing the consumer-culture of film, photo and press.[15]

Elder's image-making career especially tracked these developments in post-war media from 1950s cinema, advertising and fine art in his work for *Mad* through 1960s television in *Humbug* and 1970s soft-core pornography in his and Kurtzman's long-running 'Playboy' Magazine strip *Little Annie Fanny*. Consistent throughout his career was the filling of pages with 'Chicken Fat', his own description for the many sight gags, signs, puns and screwball visual and verbal asides that occur. These are more than visual whimsy; as Clowes has observed, 'the backgrounds are literally cluttered with information about the artist himself and the very specific urban culture from which he has risen'.[16] Elder's specific background was Yiddish Bronx, the same slum-dwelling, working-class environment as many Jewish and Italian émigré cartoonists.

Where Elder's work was antic and filled with sight gags delineated in wiggly line-work and cross-hatching, Wally Wood's work for *Mad* was a very different style of cartooning; realistic, densely detailed, with heavy use of ink wash and process white to create a chiaroscuro effect. As Wood's style was less cartoonishly screwball than Elder or Davis he was assigned superhero properties like *Superman*, *Batman* and *Wonder Woman* to pastiche as he could accurately mimic the static styles of DC artists such as Al Plastino and Wayne Boring. Hunt Emerson has noted of Wood's work that

> I knew about 'Plastic Sam' before Plastic Man and 'Batboy and Rubin' before Batman and Robin. I first learned of horror films from *Mad* … I used to copy the drawings … I don't think that I was really aware that there were actual people who drew these comics – I'd see the word 'Wood' in gothic script carved into a pirate ship and I'd take it for just another of the crazy bits I didn't understand and would howl with laughter at it.[17]

[15] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p 166-169.
[16] Clowes, Introduction, *Will Elder – The Mad Playboy of Art*, p 2-3.
[17] Emerson, *Blab* No.2, p. 92.

Wood's aptitude at mimicry would see him repeatedly commissioned to parody newspaper strips through the 1950s.

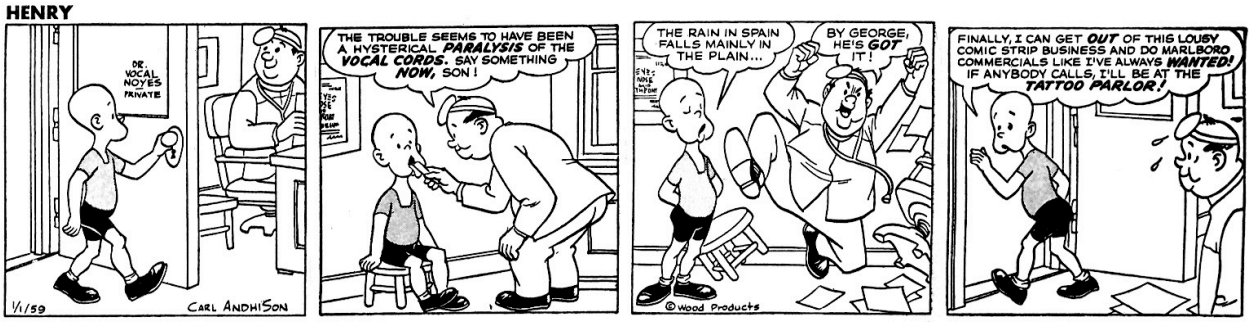

Fig 2.7 'The End of Comics', Al Jaffee & Wally Wood, *Mad* No. 43, pub. December 1958

For example, Al Jaffee and Wood's 'The End of Comics' imagines the final episodes of newspaper strips like Carl Andersen's pantomime strip character *Henry*. Henry's mutism is diagnosed not as a comic trope but the product of 'paralysis of the vocal cords', or hysterical dysphonia. On being cured his assertion that he will now 'get *out* of the lousy comic strip business and do Marlboro commercials' and be 'at the *tattoo parlor*' suggests his voicelessness was a psychological circumstance of being trapped as a child cartoon character.

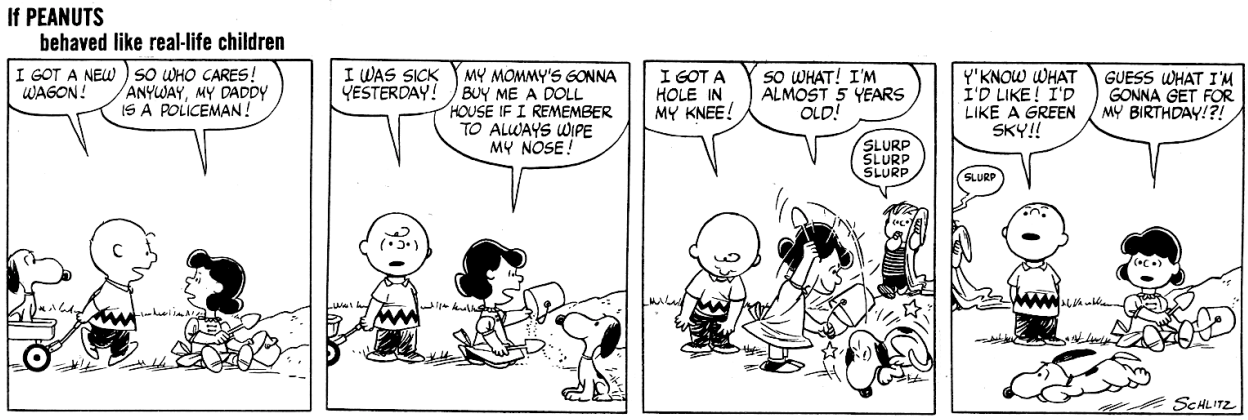

Fig 2.8 'If *Peanuts* behaved like real-life children', Al Jaffee & Wally Wood, *Mad* No. 81, pub. September 1963

Similarly, 'If *Peanuts* behaved like real-life children' mimics the emotional pitch and visual pace of *Peanuts* strip but combines it with the attention-deficient perspective of real children. Lucy's declaration that 'My mommy's gonna buy me a doll house if I remember to always wipe my nose!' and Charlie Brown's announcement that 'I was sick yesterday' seem socially stilted and atonal. This dysjunction occurs with the inversion of the reader's expectation. Used to reading the *Peanuts* characters as unconsciously articulating adult theological and psychological concerns, the reader frames these spontaneous and authentic childhood musings instead as the voice of disturbed adulthood. Charlie Brown's beatific gaze upwards while he states,

rhetorically and without context, ‘Y’know what I’d like! I’d like a green sky!!’ is genuinely unsettling, as if he is communicating from some damaged otherworld.

As well as satirising cinema, advertising and TV, *Mad* also began to examine the *structure* of comics and play with their relationship between to other media. In strips such as ‘Home Movies’ or ‘Slow Motion’ the action on the page is decelerated so that everyday activities such as drooling babies and ten-pin bowling strikes are stretched across pages; this self-reflexive examination of the pace of reading was particular to *Mad*, and the speed of panel-to-panel reading is further slowed by expositional texts that narrated or subtitled the inaction.

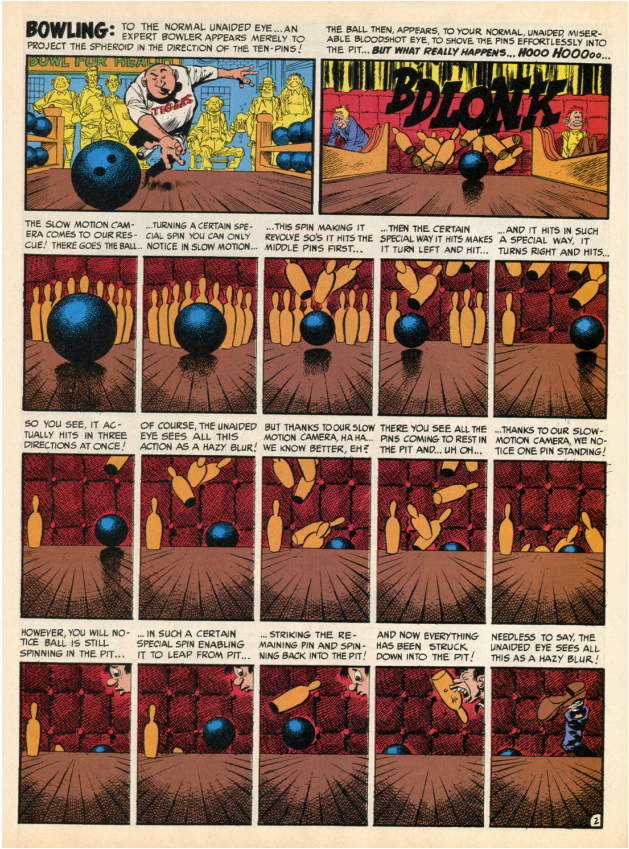

Fig 2.9 ‘Slow Motion’, Harvey Kurtzman & Jack Davis, *Mad* No. 21, pub. Mar 1955

Mad would repeatedly pastiche the same comic strips – there were persistent recurrences of *Peanuts*, *Superman*, *Mary Worth*, *Henry*, *Mandrake the Magician*, *Li’l Abner*, *Pogo*, *Dick Tracy* and *Little Orphan Annie*. These represented a ‘family’ of popular strip types – the gang of ne’er-do-well children, the superhero, the soap opera, the pantomime, the occultist, the bumpkin, the talking animals, the detective and the innocent abroad. In one story these characters were all brought together (along with many others) for ‘A Mad ‘Comic’ Opera’[18] Being an opera it is a work of relentless histrionic passion and violence; characters like Dick Tracy, infamous for the

[18] *Mad Magazine* No. 56 pub. July 1960.

violence in his comic strip, tips over into outright sadism when, aiming his gun at an adulterous Dr Ben Casey, he accidentally shoots a realistic Dagwood Bumstead from the strip *Blondie*, the whole rendered in Wood's darkest and most three-dimensionally modelled style.



Fig 2.10 'A Mad 'Comic' Opera,' Frank Jacobs & Wally Wood, *Mad* No. 56, pub July 1960

After leaving *Mad* Wood produced a significant artwork which predated the first underground comic book anthologies by over a year when in 1967 he drew what became known as the 'Disneyland Orgy' for magazine *The Realist*.

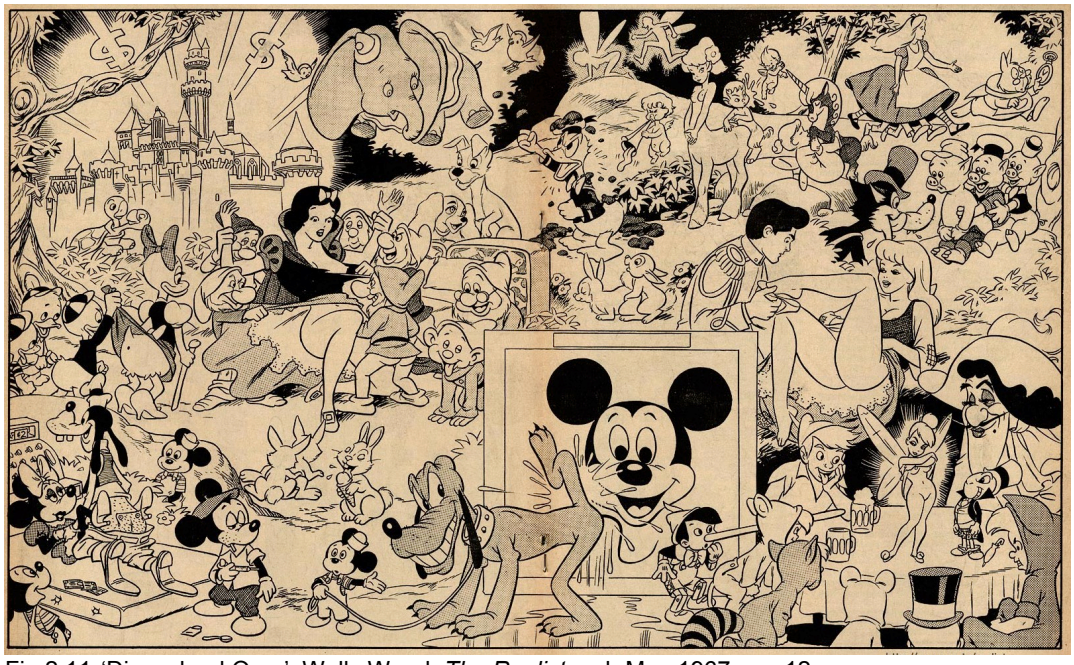
Fig 2.11 'Disneyland Orgy', Wally Wood, *The Realist*, pub May 1967, pg. 12

Taking a cue from the 'Tijuana Bible' comics of the 1930s (eight or sixteen page pornographic pamphlets that sexually satirised contemporaneous celebrities or public figures such as Mae West or John Dillinger), Wood produced a note-perfect pastiche of the Disney 'House Style' to detail an orgy of sex and drug-taking by the globally recognizable Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck *et al*. This appropriation and debasement of childhood or innocent source material as a visual strategy to critique political and moral hierarchies was one of the key philosophical drivers of the counterculture that found visual expression in underground comics.

Those early *Mad* fans like Spiegelman, together with ex-advertising artists like Crumb and Rick Griffin, were by the late 1960s creating the underground comics of the hippy era begun with *Zap Comix*. Crumb's work especially drew on 'bigfoot' cartooning and 'funny animal' newspaper comic strips, these visual inspirations the outcome of a bad LSD trip in 1965 when

> All of these crazy 1940s cartoon images were dancing in my head, I was fascinated by all that Grade B style of 'funny animal', sub-Disney cartooning … dancing electric images, and since my rational mind was completely dysfunctional, it allowed all this stuff to pour out. I didn't worry about whether it made sense or not, so all those characters like Mr Natural and The Old Pooperoo came out of that period.[19]

As Crumb's work developed he also began to satirise newspaper strips in the *Mad* tradition, as in 'Little Orphan Amphetamine' which recast the *Annie* strip's young naïf as a drugged-up rich kid slumming it in San Francisco, a simultaneous assault on both 'straight' culture as represented by mainstream newspapers and the meaningless hedonism of the counterculture. There was often a tension in underground artists' relationship with the targets of their work, as *Zippy the Pinhead* creator Bill Griffith noted,

> When I was a kid rebelling against the 'bourgeois decadence' all around me in Levittown, I secretly loved it all, secretly wanted a mowed lawn, clean short and neat room. I loved it and hated it at the same time.[20]

Other cartoonists also drew on newspaper strips for inspiration; Jay Lynch's 'Nard N'Pat' strip referenced the jazz-age cartooning of Sidney Smith's *The Gumps* and George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Bobby London also chose *Krazy Kat* as inspiration for his *Dirty Duck* strip, and Shary Flenniken's *Trots and Bonnie* stories of childhood sexuality and violence visually echoes the work of Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* and Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo*. Many of this first generation of underground artists subsequently worked for their own significant influence *Mad* Magazine in the 1980s and 1990s, when their visual aesthetic and confrontational

[19] Crumb, Interview with Jon Longhi - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oj6oD9_SkQ (Accessed 7 June 2016).
[20] Donahue, *Apex Treasury of Underground Comics*, p. 114.

sensibility were being adopted by American fine artists such as Paul McCarthy, Raymond Pettibon and Jim Shaw.

By the beginning of the 1970s the American underground comics scene had began to dissipate along with the rest of the hippy movement. The next publication to address newspaper comic strip culture was *Arcade*, an anthology magazine published from 1975. Co-edited by Spiegelman and Griffith, it formed a bridge from the 1960s undergrounds to later publications such as *Raw* and *Weirdo* and featured the contributions of writers like Charles Bukowski and William Burroughs and filmmaker George Kuchar. The inclusion of such marginal and experimental figures diminished the focus on visual excess, introduced greater verbal content and established the framework for new hybrid approaches. *Arcade* also included a section reprinting the work of overlooked newspaper comic strip artists. However, it only ran for six issues and ceased publication in late 1976, the last significant underground publication.

At this point my interests in American comics culture and fine art began to elide. Therefore further developments in the overlap between postmodern and meta-textual approaches within the two fields will be discussed within the context of my own emerging practice in Chapter Three.

Newspaper Comics Culture in Britain

In contrast, the British history of newspaper comics production engaged with self-referentiality, examination and subversion is much smaller and shorter. The content of self-reflexive comics production tends to be socio-political, radical and descended from visual precedents such as Victorian 'penny dreadfuls', illustrators such as Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Rackham, and techniques such as collage and montage. This sensibility has run through British Pop and 1960s psychedelic art, the underground comics of 1970s Arts Labs and and the satirical cartoons of Biff and *Viz Comic*.

In terms of newspaper strips, the first of note is Wally Fawkes' 'Daily Mail' newspaper strip *Flook* (1949-1984) which detailed the adventures of a small cartoon pig in the corridors of power and, according to Adam Smith, 'may be the greatest unlauded daily strip of the post war age, and is certainly among the most criminally uncollected.'[21] *Flook* emerged from the bohemian British jazz scene and was scripted by musicians and writers like George Melly, Barry Norman, Humphrey Lyttelton and Barry Took.

[21] Smith, 'Looking Back At Flook: An Interview with Wally Fawkes,' *The Comics Journal*, Sep 2013.

The first notable example of a British newspaper strip to accurately reflect the counterculture was Barry Humphries and Nicholas Garland's *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* published from 1965 in 'Private Eye'. The 1988 complete collection carries the subtitle 'Not so Much a Legendary Strip, More a Resonant Social History Per Se', which accurately summarises its historical and cultural context. The strip documents the 'fish out of water' exploits of a drunkenly gauche Australian in London's 'Swinging Sixties', making passes at minor royals and rooming with junkie folk singers. 'Private Eye' is also notable for other newspaper strips such as Bill Tidy's *Porton Down* and *The Cloggies*.

Flook writers such as Melly and Took were regular pundits on daytime nostalgia and quiz television shows from the 1960s to the 1980s such as 'Looks Familiar' and 'Quick on the Draw.' These were developed by Denis Gifford who wrote and published many books on British comics history.[22] Gifford's critical language and historical perspective is summarised by the introduction to one of his collections of British newspaper cartoons:

> The strip cartoon, four frames of fun or three of thrills, is so familiar a feature of the everyday newspaper scene that one would be hard put to find a regular reader that recalled the day when no such cartoon capers brightened his papers.[23]

This quote articulates the effusive and lightweight approach that British comics consideration often defaulted to. While there was a satirical aspect to the content, the British model of cartoon and newspaper strip culture was dominated by a handful of writers and artists for whom comics production was a sideline to a mainstream career or creative pursuit. Their public profiles cleaved to a 'hail fellow well-met' persona that reflexively rejected analysis; comics were a means to poke fun and burst balloons of pomposity, the domain of comics assessment a garden-shed pursuit for armchair critics. The level of analysis was confined to the fanzine which by its nominative nature was enthusiastically positive. The introduction to another Gifford publication from 1971 echoes this tone:

> "Hello Chums!"
>
> Increasingly the comic paper is being collected, catalogued, examined and exhibited. In France there is a learned society of students and historians of the comic; in America there is an Academy of Comic Book Arts; in Italy more than one serious magazine is devoted to strip cartoon archaeology. Curiously, only Great Britain, where the comic paper was born, takes its comics for what they superficially seem – ephemera to be discarded as soon as read. There have always been collectors of comics, of course, but their motive is

[22] Gifford is a significant figure in British comics history; schoolfriend of Bob Monkhouse, the pair wrote, drew and published comics together as children. Gifford continued writing and drawing comics through the 1950s, wrote for Morecambe & Wise, wrote many British comics history books and boasted the world's largest collection of comic books.
[23] Gifford, *Stap Me – The History of the British Newspaper Comic Strip*, p. 2.

> nostalgia - a recapturing of a long-lost childhood. Now, increasingly, comics are being rediscovered for their artistic qualities, as well as for their accidental value as social documents. This concise but comprehensive history of the comic concentrates on the comparatively unknown evolution of the British picture paper, while tracing the parallel development of the American newspaper comic supplement and that vehicle of the super-hero, the comic-book.[24]

Parallel to the handful of 'Private Eye' strips, in the early 1970s there was a boom in 'head' shops that stocked drug paraphernalia, posters, counterculture magazines like *International Times* and *Oz* and British underground comics. These latter tended to be mainly reprints of *Zap Comix* and other American material, but two significant domestic comics were *Nasty Tales* and *Cozmic Comics*. Although not rigidly demarcated, the content of the two titles usefully defined parallel strands of British society in the early 1970s. *Nasty Tales* tended to reflect the agit-prop, street political, tribal culture of anti-war demos, football hooliganism, industrial action, racial, social and religious unrest, while *Cosmic Comics* drew on the fantasy of British writers like Michael Moorcock and JRR Tolkien and was often depicted in a lurid style modeled on approximations of American 'sword and sorcery' artists like Richard Corben and Frank Frazetta. This latter material was often in keeping with the prevailing seedy culture of 'Carry On' and 'Confessions' films, peep shows and nudie mags. Although very little of this British work quoted or referenced newspaper strip precedents in the way American underground material did, some of the more infantile or toilet humour could be considered a stepping stone from childrens' comics like *The Beano* and *Dandy* and Bamforth's 'Saucy Seaside' postcards to the content of *Viz Comic* in the 1980s. A number of other underground titles followed in the mid-1970s, many published by Birmingham's Arts Lab, but a combination of poor distribution and low print-runs meant they made little cultural impact, and the arrival of punk marked the end of the offset lithograph British underground production and replaced it with the photocopied cut-and-paste blackmail graphics and fanzine aesthetic of the late 1970s onwards.

Summary

Whereas newspaper strips have been extensively examined throughout post-war American comics culture to the present, they have rarely been considered or critiqued in British comics history. Similarly, while there has been a long history of pastiche and satire relating to American newspaper strips, this has not been mirrored in domestic comics production.

[24] Gifford, *Discovering Comics*, p. 3.

Chapter Three: Method - Parody, Pastiche & Process

> 'A good or great parodist has to have some secret sympathy for the original, just as a great mimic has to have the capacity to put himself/herself in the place of the person imitated.'[1]

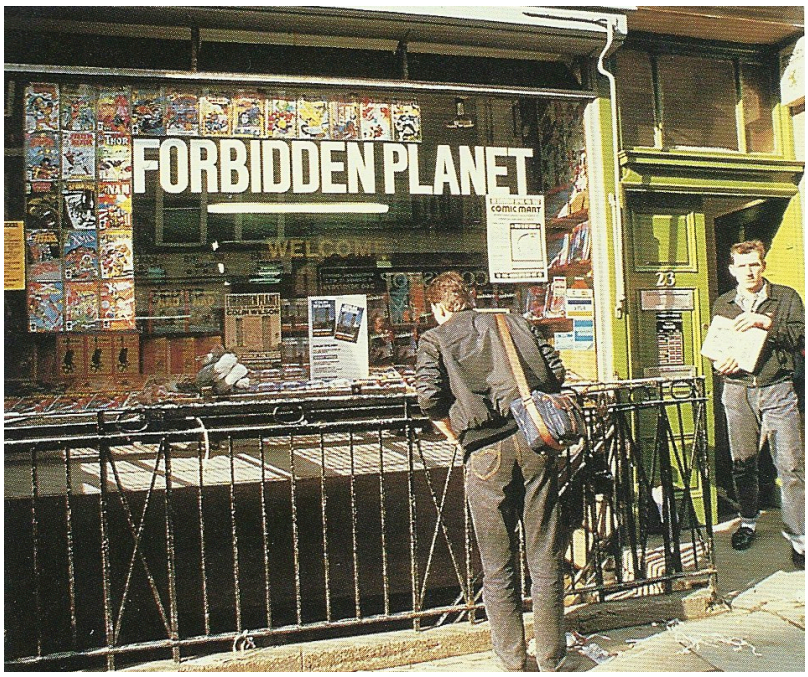

Fig 3.1 The Author and his friend Rob (facing camera) outside 'Forbidden Planet' Bookshop, London, c.June 1987[2]

Over the last 22 years my art practice has evolved across a range of forms including large-scale drawings for gallery exhibitions, comic books and artists publications. This chapter will examine key projects and how each has informed the next to build a group of artworks that interconnect and overlap in themes, concerns and techniques. I have selected art works that reflect specific biographical influences and use strategies from comics production. These examples are not exhaustive but are representative of works produced since 1994.

My working method is project-oriented, and entails identifying a creative model and researching this through social history, popular culture and art history. Models I have adopted are the standard American comic book format, the childrens' illustrated book and the editorial or political cartoon. The model is appropriated and manipulated to both examine its context and content in order to make a new artwork.

I began making work in the early 1990s when much fine art practice was rooted in the postmodernist sensibility. This was not a calculatedly conscious strategy on my part in

[1] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 5.
[2] Photo from Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix*, & Graphic Novels, p. 157. I was astonished when I saw this in 2014, as it is the only contemporary picture of living people in the book.

response to a movement, more to the general creative context of the time, where borrowing from comics was an element of my work as much as aspects of cinema, fanzine and music culture, and where appropriation was an equally acknowledged creative mode. Linda Hutcheon has summarized this approach where 'parody can be used as a self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past.'[3] My work initially emerged out of non-fine art frameworks but was then presented within those exhibition and publishing contexts. More recent projects have built on this foundation and attempted to further synthesise exhibition practice and publication models to create a hybrid space where comics culture and fine art practice overlap and correlate. As in fine art, parody can be used in comics production to draw attention to social, cultural, political and formal aspects of the source material being discussed and examined.

As well as parody, my work adopts pastiche as a process to visually frame and structure material. There are subtle distinctions in these two formal approaches. While pastiche adopts the stylistic aspects, genre content and physical form of the relevant property, parody considers and satirises the distinctive formal attributes and cultural context of the property to generate new creative content. Therefore, pastiche provides the broad visual and textual framework within which parody engages with the intent and context of the property as a tool to examine and subvert. Pastiche functions as a lampoon or burlesque while parody uses micro-strategies such as irony, exaggeration and mimicry to reflect on and reappraise the original source material within a contemporary context. As Hutcheon states, 'through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference.'[4]

In my comics work a representative instance of both pastiche and parody being deployed would be from *Nine Panel Grid* No. 3 in a self-contained semi-autobiographical story called 'School's Out'. Set in the mid-1970s, it tells the story of two adolescent boys meeting, listening to music, reading and discussing comics and smoking dope. The comic story a character reads called 'Baloney' is a pastiche of underground cartoonist Robert Crumb's story 'Meatball'[5] which uses the metaphor of being struck by a flying meatball to represent the cosmic enlightenment of a psychedelic trip.

[3] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Post-Modernism*, p. 101.
[4] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Post-Modernism*, p. 101.
[5] Meatball', *Zap Comix 0*, pub. Apex Novelties, Oct 1967.



Fig 3.2 James Pyman & Caspar Williams, 'School's Out' from *Nine Panel Grid* No. 3, 17cm x 26cm and detail, pub. 1994

Crumb's style is imitated by combining 'spoofs' of the original 'Meatball' panels with other surreal and sexual imagery typical of Crumb's free-associative image-making. Crumb's 'bigfoot' cartoon style clashes with the slicker, cleaner visual approach of the 'School's Out' story. Within the narrative the effect of reading combined with smoking dope confuses and nauseates the adolescent protagonist.

Another example of the conflation of parody and pastiche is an illustration from *The Adventures of Lionel – The Book of Hours* which shows a generic 1960s-era comic book lying on the endpapers. The comic is hidden inside the book as if surreptitiously placed, hidden from view as a debased artefact.

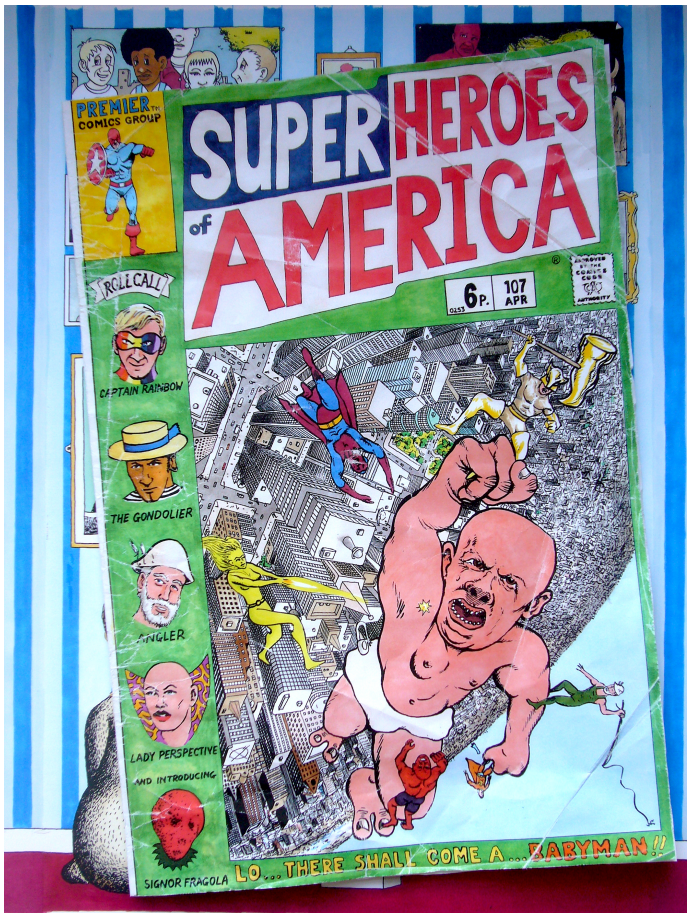

Fig 3.3 James Pyman, *The Adventure of Lionel: The Book of Hours* (inside back cover), ink on paper, 21 x 29cm, pub. 2010

The pastiche elements of the cover image are the adaptations of the traditional Marvel Comics character 'corner box', the DC Comics-style 'role call' strip of headshots, and other visual and textual design tropes associated with Bronze Age superhero comics. The crumpling and creasing of the comic implies a lack of care that suggests the comic is an artefact of low commercial or cultural value, deliberately calling attention to and ironising the contemporary collectability of artefacts from this period.

The parodic aspects of the work are the manipulations of superhero content to draw attention to iconic leitmotifs; the supervillain, often a giant monster in comics of the period, is actually a huge baby wearing a nappy. The hero characters are generic versions of superhero archetypes such as the superman, the magician, alien and sorceress. 'Captain Rainbow' is an ersatz equivalent of characters like Superman or Captain America. Similarly, 'Lady Perspective' is a manqué version of both Marvel Comics' Scarlet Witch and DC Comics' Zatanna, while 'Angler' is a weapon-using character in the manner of Hawkeye or Green Arrow, the name a play on both the term for a fisherman and a hero whose power is to somehow warp angles.

Both these examples demonstrate references to historical forms and visual material that have been interposed within other narratives. The styles of Robert Crumb and Bronze Age comics function as pastiches but are contextualised as a parody within larger narratives.

I will now outline the history of my practice and focus on certain works that have bridged comics culture and fine art practice, while also considering precedents and influences that informed their making.

3.1 *Nine Panel Grid* (1994-1997)

By 1989 I had been out of art college for five years, made little new artwork and had no contact with what would be considered the 'art world'. Having focussed on video and performance art at college I had continued to apply for development grants with no success. This was during a period when culturally there was a growing transatlantic overlap between British anti-Thatcherite grassroots indie music supported by fanzine production of a 'samizdat' nature and a comparable American 'slacker' culture of hardcore music, small-press autobiographical comics and no-budget film production.

At this point the term 'underground comics' was redundant and had been replaced by 'independent' or 'alternative' comics in the same way that 'punk' or 'new wave' music had become 'independent' or 'alternative' music. In New York Francoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman had begun to publish *Raw*, a comics anthology which in visual tone and textual concerns overlapped with the downtown arts and music scene. As with Spiegelmans' previous magazine *Arcade*, *Raw* would also republish and reconsider classic newspaper strips by acknowledged exemplars such as Winsor McCay and Basil Wolverton.

One *Raw* contribution cited by many comics artists as an important influence was Richard McGuire's 'Here', a six-page story that details the history of a space briefly inhabited by the corner of a room in an American suburban house from the year 500,957,406,073 BC up to 2030 AD.



Fig 3.4 Richard McGuire, ‘Here’, p. 1, pub. 1989

‘Here’ begins in 1957, the year of McGuire’s birth, and there are clearly autobiographical elements to the work. The first panel shows the corner of the room, and the first person depicted in the second panel is a pregnant woman announcing to her husband ‘Honey? I think it’s time,’ establishing the key theme of the work in a quotidian vernacular statement. As the rigid, six panel grid structure progresses, other panels appear inside panels with different year dates captioned and images of the actions or events that occurred at those points in time. The panels become increasingly layered and subdivided, as children grow up and have birthday parties, people depart to and return from wars, dance and cry, and the house is depicted being built in 1902 and burning down in 2029.

Although ‘Here’ has conceptual precedents within photography such as Kenneth Josephson’s ‘Chicago’ (1972) and video art in Mick Hartney’s ‘Anchored State’ (1980), McGuire moves beyond a purely formalist or structuralist examination of the representation of space and temporality. The narrative and visual ruptures within the panels of ‘Here’ create a layering of meaning both linguistically and visually; dialogue overlaps and contradicts, and figures echo movements across time. Chris Ware has written that ‘Here’ introduced ‘a new dimension to visual narrative that radically departed from the traditional up-down and left-right reading of

comic strips. And the structure was organic, nodding not only to the medium's past but also hinting at its future.'[6]

Where *Raw* drew connections with both the metropolitan arts scene and the canon of historical comic strips, Robert Crumb's anthology magazine *Weirdo* instead embraced the worlds of 'punk' and 'outsider' art; contributors would often have mental health issues, drug problems and personality disorders, and their work would reflect and examine these conditions. Unlike *Raw*'s considered curation, *Weirdo* was a compendium of disordered approaches and styles, often the uglier and scrappier the more preferable. Crumb's covers would parody classic *Mad* or *Humbug* magazine covers.

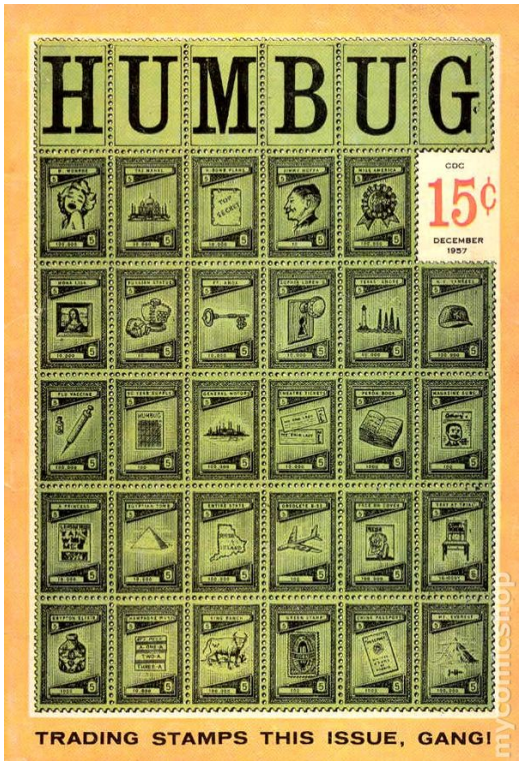

Fig 3.5 *Humbug* No. 5, pub. Dec 1957

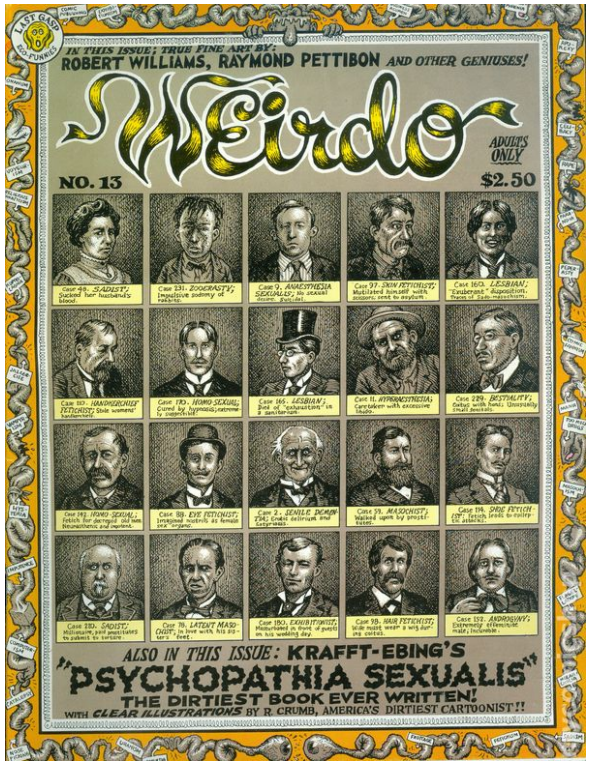

Fig 3.6 *Weirdo* No 13, Robert Crumb, pub. Jun 1985

As later *Weirdo* editor Peter Bagge also noted of the aesthetic distinction between *Raw* and *Weirdo*,

> *Raw* magazine came out … I had real mixed feelings about it. What they seemed to be elevating themselves to was adopting this fine art attitude … to try to adopt this finer attitude and philosophy and this really slick paper, it looked to me like it was a gallery that you held in your hands – I was like, "Ugggghhh."[7]

[6] Ware, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/17/chris-ware-here-richard-mcguire-review-graphic-novel (Accessed 23 October 2016).
[7] Bagge, *The Comics Journal* No. 159, p. 69-70.

Bagge's perception matches other cartoonists' reflexive responses and attitudes. His upbringing was blue-collar, he had a childhood interest in drawing through reading comics and watching Warner Bros cartoons, and was an educational flunk who initially failed to get into art school and was frustrated by the experience when he did. His distinction between the two contemporaneous magazines is symptomatic of a fundamental division in comics culture that developed from the 1980s; the *Raw* contributors' work began to be critiqued within a fine art language and context and increasingly exhibited in galleries while *Weirdo*'s aesthetic fitted a street culture vernacular that viewed intellectual consideration and white cube spaces as bourgeois. Bagge noted of his art education that

> I had a drawing teacher … a really good artist, hyper-realistic, and a successful fine artist. I told him that I was thinking of becoming a cartoonist and he said, "Are you serious?" And I said, "Yeah." And he just did a 180 and walked away and never talked to me again.[8]

Although a subjective observation, interviews with many cartoonists and comic artists reveal similar experiences. Broadly, professional comics creators often have a cynical and suspicious relationship to fine art, and especially conceptual practice. There is also a sense that their creative output is dismissed by the art establishment. Ware, whose comics work has been exhibited in the Whitney Biennial, has wryly noted that

> Even in light of the ever-ringing dinner bell of "comics not being just for kids anymore" (usually in a review of some gallery show titled "Zap! Bang! Pow!"), the associations of childhood and puerility are still hard to shake; comics are the only art form that many "normal" people arrive at expecting a specific emotional reaction (laughter) or a specific content (superheroes).[9]

From the mid-1980s Fantagraphics Books published a number of autobiographical comics.[10] As publisher Gary Groth stated of their ethos,

> We really wanted to elevate the discourse about comics and cartooning and our mission was to try to elevate the form. We were using as our paradigm underground comics which was the first time that comics had liberated themselves from commercial constraints and where cartoonists were engaging in unfettered expression ... And what started happening in the 1980s is that artists could represent life in its fuller spectrum, and they could represent the ordinariness of life, and they weren't compelled to work at the extremes, which a lot of underground cartoonists were.[11]

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[8] Bagge, *The Comics Journal* No. 159, p. 65.
[9] Ware, *McSweeneys Quarterly Concern No. 13*, p. 6.
[10] As well as Clowes' *Eightball*, other autobiographical comics were Jim Woodring's *Jim*, Julie Doucet's *Dirty Plotte*, Dennis Eichorn's *Real Stuff* and Joe Sacco's *Yahoo*. The term was eventually contracted to 'autobio', an odd term as 'graphical' is what is lost from this linguistic shorthand.
[11] Groth, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6iqnOsYCbA. (Accessed 28 August 2015).

There was a simultaneous British small-press autobiographical movement by cartoonists such as Eddie Campbell, Glenn Dakin and Phil Elliott. This upsurge in activity was paralleled by a number of gallery exhibitions considering the relationship between fine art practice and comics production, notably 'Comic Iconoclasm' at the ICA (1987), 'High & Low' at NY MOMA (1990) and 'Misfit Lit' at Seattle's Center of Contemporary Art (1991).

The predominant aesthetic of the British work was technically simple, often taking influences from Victorian illustration or the *ligne claire* ('clear line') technique of *Tintin* creator Hergé. In the same way that Crumb, Rick Griffin and Spain Rodriguez illustrated and reflected underground music culture, this generation of mid-1980s North American and British cartoonists similarly corresponded to the new independent or 'indie' aesthetic of small record labels, photocopied fanzines and limited edition vinyl records. In keeping with the intimate, personal content of the comics, the value of the 'handmade' was favoured over the mass-produced. Clowes has said of the period that 'there was this burgeoning zine culture that was very much against the monoculture that the mainstream was in the early '90s, and this crowd became our audience.'[12]

I felt that within these simultaneous transatlantic poles of activity there could be a space to make artwork in a form that adopted and also investigated these subcultural and distributional contexts. As Joe Sacco has said of the period:

> What I've always liked about comics – and I'm talking about the underground tradition and what has followed - is the subversive nature … You can do things with comics; you can sort of let your hair down in this way, and there was that beautiful moment in the 1980s and early 1990s when I realized no-one is paying attention.[13]

It was this sense of no-one 'paying attention' that appealed to me, as working in a simultaneously private but public space. Prior to that 'moment', in the intervening period when I had stopped making my own teenage comics with Caspar in 1976, my drawing had been limited to life studies and projects at Foundation level. At the time these had only revealed to me my technical and compositional shortcomings. As cartoonist Seth has described this phase, 'childhood drawings are kind of charming, then there are terrible teenage drawings. That awful period when the drawing struggles to get better – it loses the charm of childhood but has none of the polish of adult work. Just awful drawings.'[14] I considered that starting from a limited level of ability might be a valuable model to test; I had no real knowledge that my technical ability or visual language might develop.

[12] http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/daniel-clowess-the-complete-eightball-comes-out-next-month/?_r=0 (Accessed 18 October 2016).
[13] 'Public Conversation: Joe Sacco and W L T Mitchell', *Critical Enquiry: Comics & Media*, p. 53.
[14] Hignite, *In the Studio*, p. 198.

Many of the innovative works in this period adopted older models of comics formatting as a 'year zero' rejection of the hyperstylised *cul de sac* that mainstream comics had arrived at. Comics like Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, Campbell's *Alec* books and Clowes' *Eightball* used a nine-panel (or 'waffle') grid page structure as established by early issues of *Mad* and 1960s *Spider-Man* comics. This format divided the comic page into three tiers of three equally-sized panels. These new works also often deployed first-person or fixed camera-perspective viewpoints rather than the language of mainstream comics with establishing shots, close-ups, and use of dramatic angles and other visual variations borrowed from cinema. The use of the grid was both a gesture of recognition of comics history and a formal device to draw the reader into the narrative. As Gibbons has said of the format, 'because the frame or the proscenium arch is always the same, you block it out, and get sucked into the picture that much more quickly.'[15] As well as the uniform grid, *Watchmen* used point-of-view perspectives within the panel space to bring the reader further into the narrative, an original device in comics that anticipated first-person perspective video games.

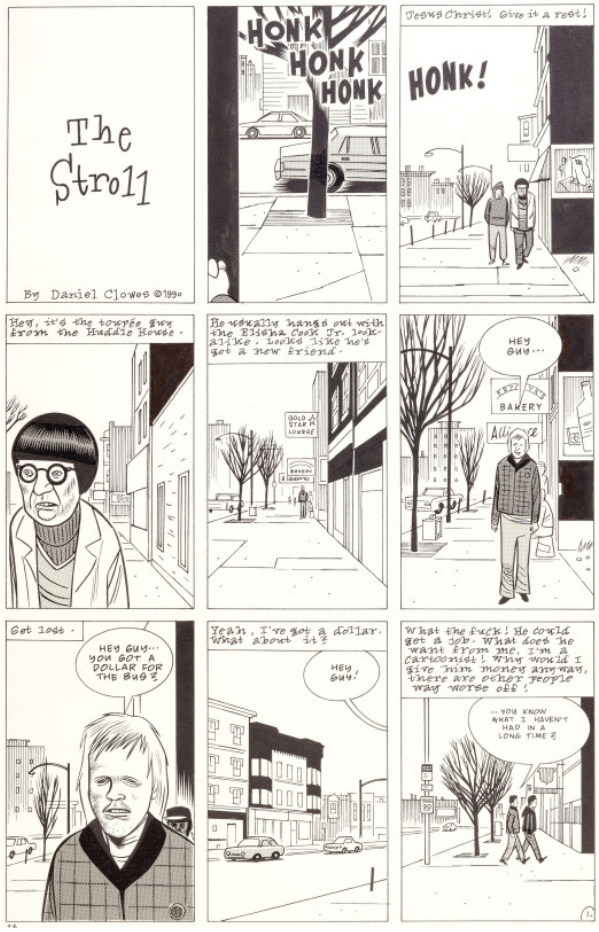


Fig 3.7 Daniel Clowes, 'The Stroll', *Eightball* No. 3, pub. March 1990

[15] Gibbons, *The Comics Journal*, No. 116, p. 100.

A key inspiration for my comics making was Clowes' comics piece 'The Stroll.' Also drawn from a point-of-view perspective, the 5-page story documented the artist taking a break from drawing to walk around his neighbourhood, detailing a series of quotidian encounters with a continuous internal monologue. At points the central character is glimpsed in shop windows or his shadow cast on a sidewalk. The tone is dispassionate, internalised and solipsistic, as if the real world is uncomfortably encroaching on the cartoonist's preferred space of the page.

Drawing on the format of *Watchmen* and *Alec*, I decided to adopt the nine-panel grid as a rigorous format as a way of re-learning comics making. I would have a strict template that would place a sequence of images on a page, structure each page as a visual unit and build groups of pages into a narrative.

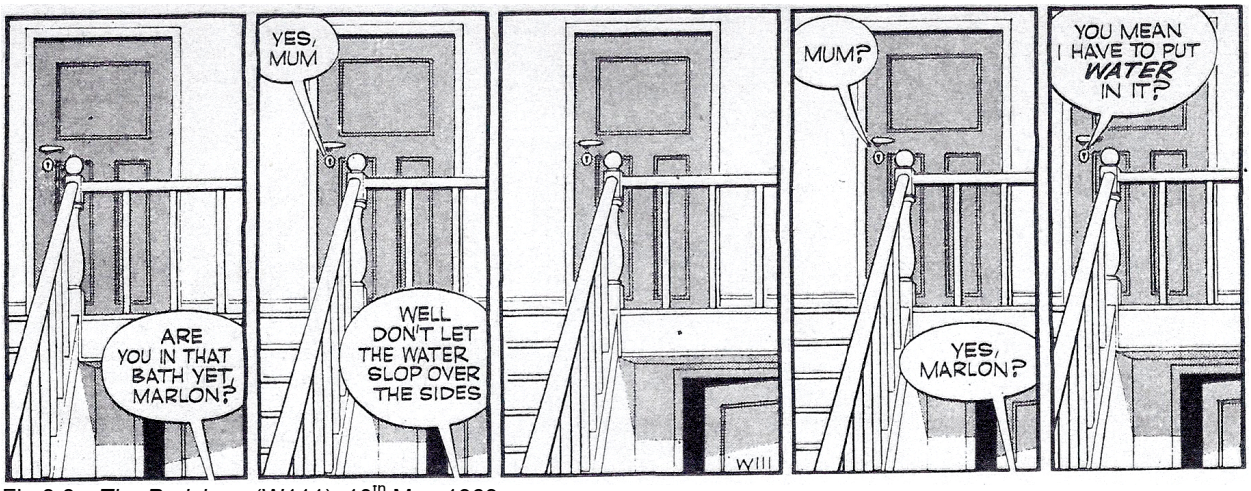


Fig 3.8 *The Perishers* (W111), 10th May 1963

For example, one stylistic *Perishers* device involved the repetition of a fixed point perspective with a conversation taking place between unseen characters. I began to draw one-page visual accounts of brief, quotidian events that were similarly closer to storyboards than conventional strips; a view of a fish tank, flies circling a lampshade, or rain beginning to fall on a pavement. I was interested in reducing or eradicating the information in a comic page to the most minimal narrative content to test how little technical aptitude or ability was necessary to produce a readable, complete comic bookwork.

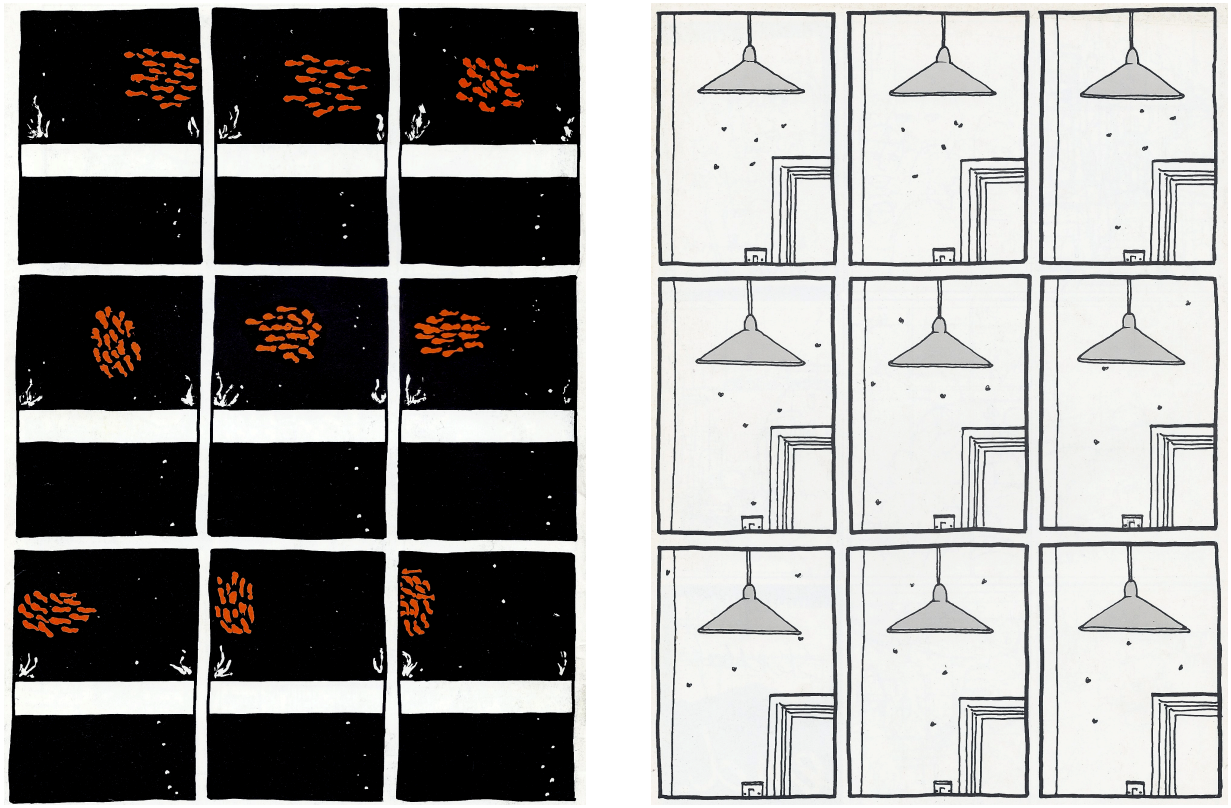


Fig 3.9 James Pyman, *Nine Panel Grid* Nos. 1 & 4 (back covers), ink on paper, 17cm x 26cm, pub. 1994 & 1995

I titled my comic book *Nine Panel Grid* as an immediate textual signifier both of its format and as an indicator of a certain conceptual 'blankness'; that the title declared the comic to represent the form *as* the content. In the process of making the one-page stories began to expand into more sustained autobiographical narratives. The first issue contained a story called 'The Star On Christmas Eve' which was an exercise in creative non-fiction, recounting a series of real events subsequently given a dramatic structure. The story was narrated from the point-of-view perspective of the protagonist (who was myself) visiting a West London pub called The Portobello Star alone on Christmas Eve.



Fig 3.10 James Pyman, 'The Star On Christmas Eve', *Nine Panel Grid* No. 1, ink on paper, 17cm x 26cm, pub. 1994

The second story was the first chapter in what was intended to culminate in a graphic novel called 'Greetings from Asbury Park, NJ', the title quoting from a Bruce Springsteen album.[16] This was conceived after a late-night telephone conversation with New York-based friend Rob recounting the details of his weekend in a New Jersey seaside resort. After I had put the phone down I realised that, although the recounting had been a series of arbitrary, unconnected and inconsequential events, there was the potential to give them the narrative shape and dramatic arc with which to construct a long-form comics story. This would creatively retell the journey of a drive from Manhattan along the New Jersey turnpike and shoreline, a night in a rundown motel, visits to diners and encounters on the boardwalk. My interest in using this second-hand memoir as material was the opportunity to borrow from and evoke personal pop-cultural touchstones such as Simon & Garfunkel's song 'America', the films of Jim Jarmusch, Raymond Carver's short stories and the poetry of Charles Bukowski. This lexicon of Americana would be rooted in a personal and anecdotal context but mediated by geographical and cultural separation, both through the experience, the telling and the re-telling.

[16] Ultimately this graphic novel remained unfinished and uncollected. The seven issues of *Nine Panel Grid* meant the work was abandoned around the halfway point with approximately 80 pages completed.

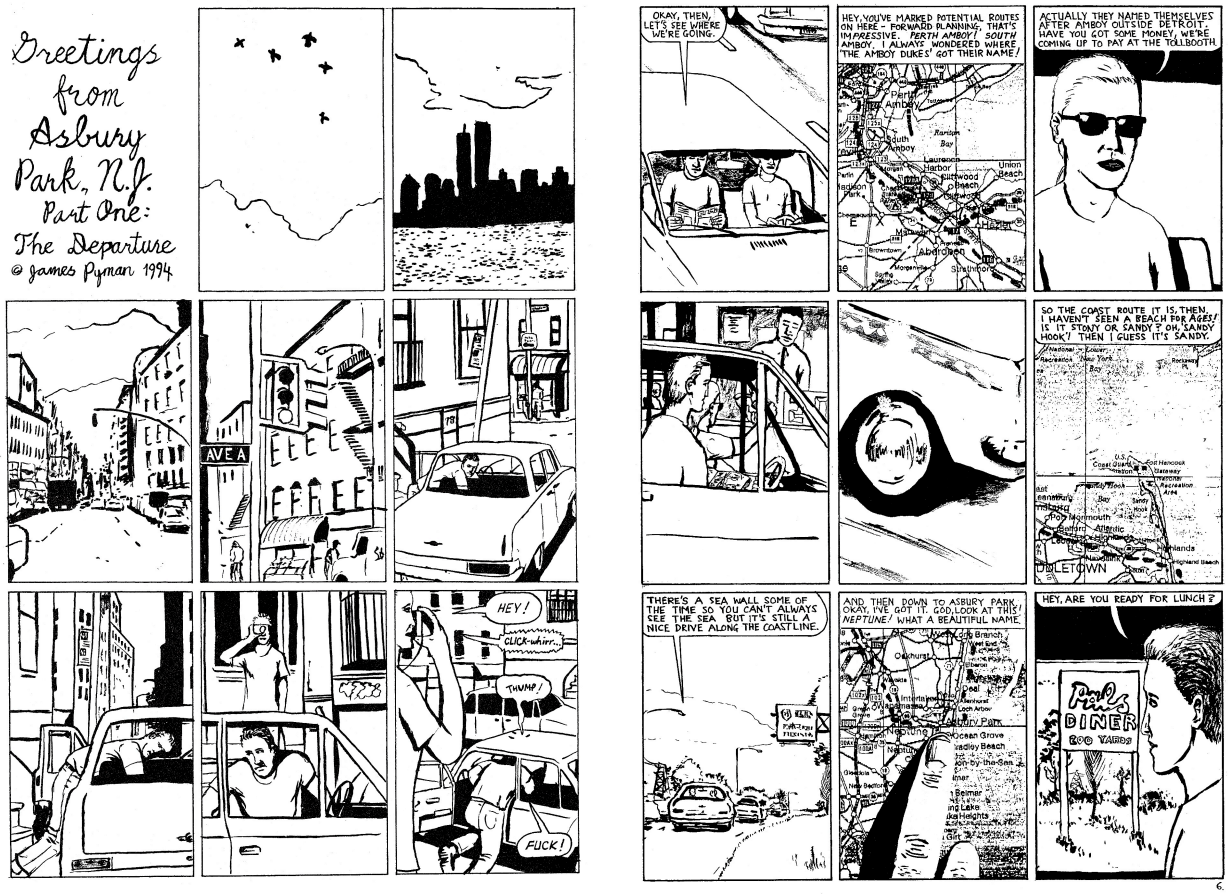


Fig 3.11 James Pyman, 'Greetings from Asbury Park', *Nine Panel Grid* Nos. 1 & 2, 17cm x 26cm, pub. 1994

At this pre-Internet point in time I used as reference photographs I had taken on previous visits to New York and sections of maps, postcards, and guide books I had kept as souvenirs. This basic archive of sources would be technically unified by a deliberately shaky and undetermined brush drawing style intended to mimic summer heat haze, smoggy roadside views and glimpsed horizons. The dialogue was also deliberately deadpan and unresolved. The intended effect was to create a visual and textual slippage, to represent an image of a geographical and cultural distance. *The Perishers* was also influential on the 'Asbury Park' narrative. One of the visual qualities of the strip I had been originally drawn to as a child was the hazy atmosphere and texture of Collins' drawing.

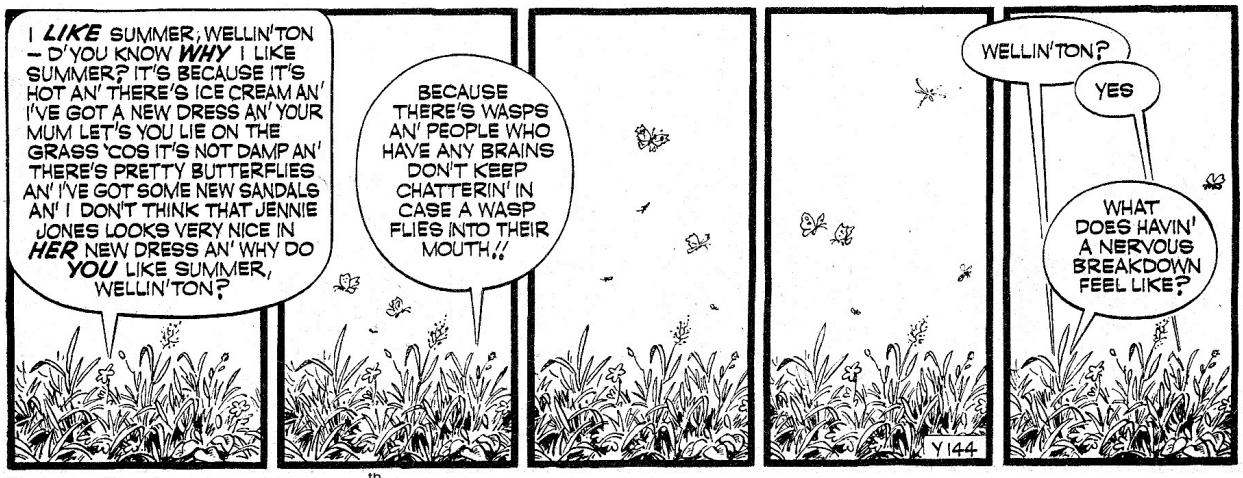


Fig 3.12 *The Perishers* (Y144), 18th June 1965

In strips like the one above, the Maisie character's incessant gabbling is counterpointed by the languid quality of the summer scene, and the silent panels where butterflies have filled the spaces previously occupied by speech balloons stretch time within the narrative.

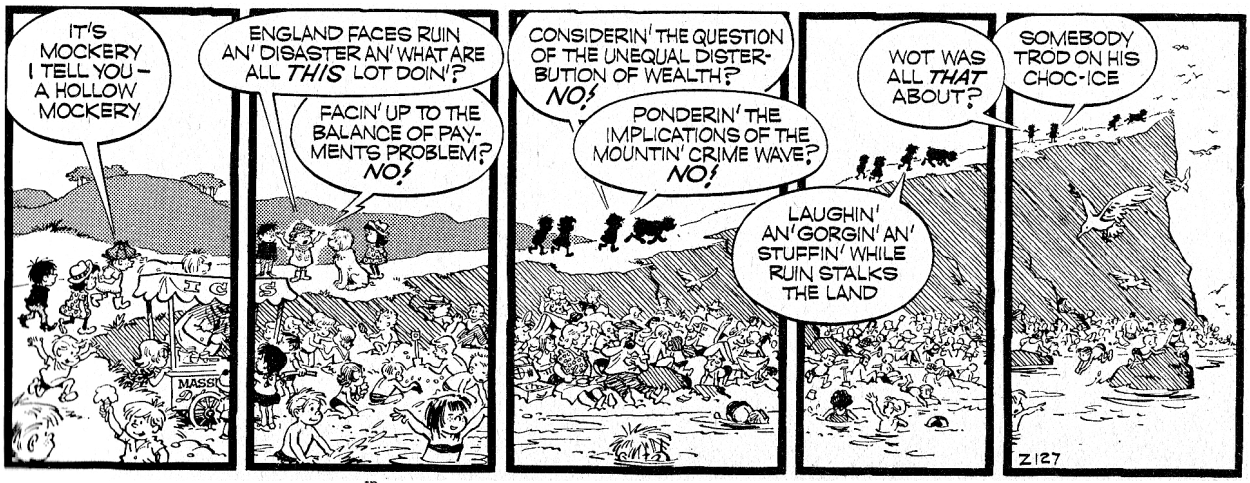


Fig 3.13 *The Perishers* (Z127), 30th May 1966

The Perishers was also influential in the use of the 'polyptych', a single image subdivided by panel borders into a narrative sequence. In this strip the children are shown walking to the cliff head, moving from the middle ground of the image into the distance. I used this compositional device for many scenes in the comic such as the tier below.

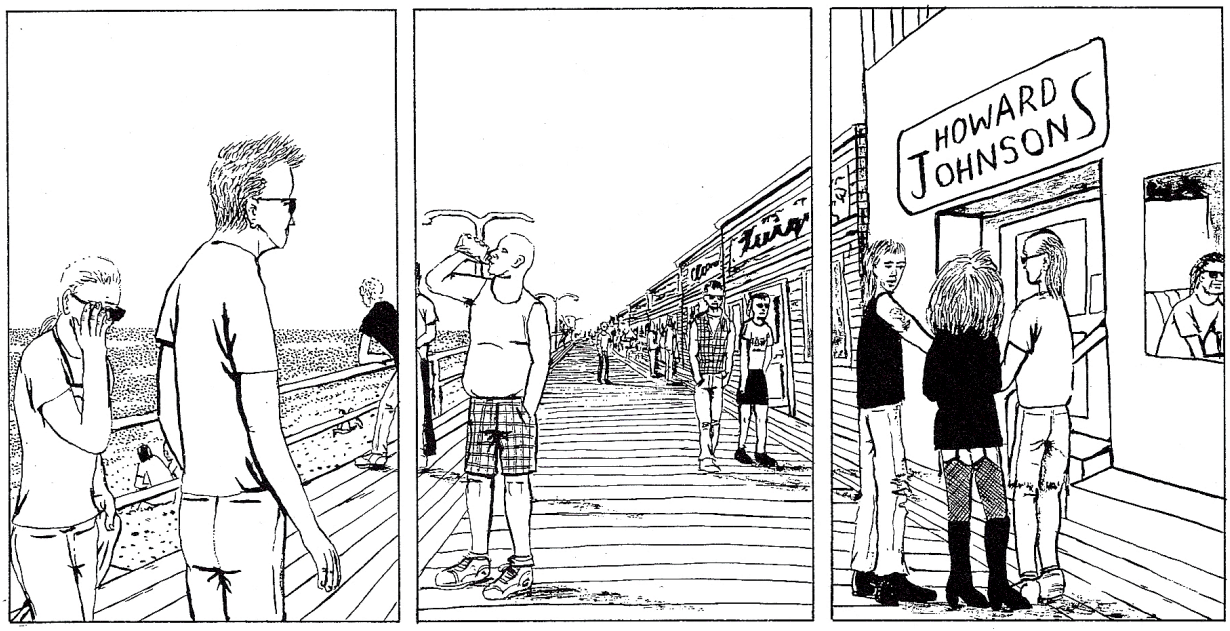


Fig 3.14 James Pyman, 'Greetings from Asbury Park', *Nine Panel Grid* No. 4, 17cm x 26cm, pub. 1995

Here the polyptych is used to represent the male protagonist observing that the boardwalk has been inundated by crowds of people. The visual information is quantised, and stopping the whole scene from being read simultaneously by subdividing it with panel borders mimics the character's dawning realisation.

Nine Panel Grid achieved a lukewarm but accurate citation from critic Frank Plowright:

> The title is the format for every page in this self-published comic. Each issue contains a chapter of the meandering ongoing 'Greetings from Asbury Park,' the story of a couple taking a trip to Asbury Park and hanging out there. He's English, she's American and it's all very dull. It's combined with individual short observation and mood pieces in which Pyman wanders the streets of London, or details a night in the pub as seen through the eyes of a drinker. As much as anything *Nine Panel Grid* appears to be a form of story-telling discipline for Pyman, whose art progresses from issue to issue, although perhaps not as much as he might like. For someone basing his stories in the everyday world, his stiff and often incorrect figurework doesn't yet match his ambition and requires more attention.[17]

The series was abandoned after seven issues due to the three months it took to make an issue impinging on exhibition commitments. Also, unknown to me at the time, my commencement of self-publishing had overlapped with the collapse and subsequent recession of the North American comics market.

[17] Plowright, *A Slings & Arrows Comic Guide*, p. 408

3.2 Large-Scale Drawings (1995-Present)

From 1995 I began to make pencil drawings again. Having only been sketching in pencil and then inking specifically for printed reproduction in *Nine Panel Grid*, I wanted to re-engage with a more tonal, visually denser and more technically demanding process. This has formed a major part of my practice ever since. The drawings depict remembered biographical moments, socio-political events and pop-cultural phenomena. Each picture is an individual piece rather than part of a series of images but they are combined in groups to spark various associations in different exhibitional contexts. In this way I see them as single panels in a longer, ever-developing narrative. The visual sources can be found images, press agency photographs, drawings from comic books or self-generated photographs and sketches, and these elements are combined to produce a hybrid image.

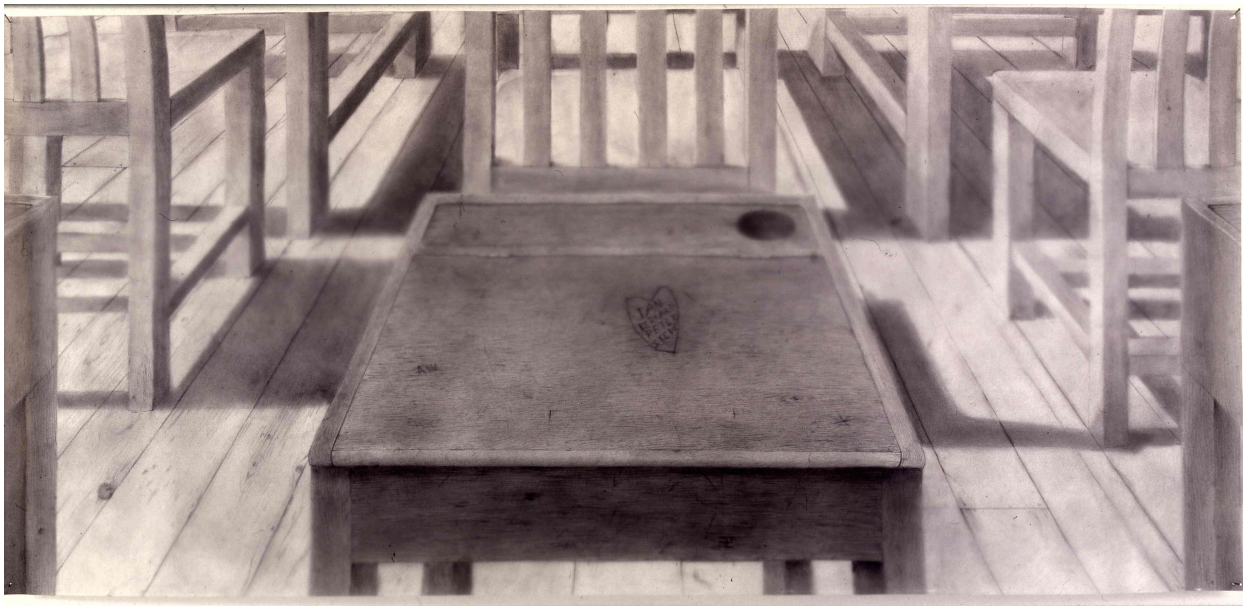


Fig 3.15 James Pyman, *1979*, 1995, pencil on paper, 76 x 152cm

The first large-scale drawing I made[18] depicts a typical school desk with a heart carved into it in the way a child or adolescent would with a pencil or compass point. Within the heart are the words 'Ian, Bernard, Peter, Steve' which were the forenames of the post-punk Manchester band Joy Division. I titled the drawing *1979* which was the year the band's debut album 'Unknown Pleasures' was released, the year I left school and the year before singer Ian Curtis committed suicide. The historical subject, context and content of the work are triangulated within the title, the names and the site of the desk.

[18] This was for a group exhibition curated by artist Jeremy Deller and themed around Valentine's Day called 'Kiss This'. The exhibition title is a lyric quote from the Sex Pistols song 'New York'.

Without a deep technical understanding I made the drawing quite quickly in a few days. To achieve a woodgrain effect I initially drew a series of roughly equidistant pencil lines approximately 2mm apart. I then smoothed these lines down with tissue or toilet paper which gave a flat, dull layer of pencil grey, erased the fine, lighter spaces between lines and drew into the lines again. I continued to apply layers of soft pencil tone and continuously smoothed and rubbed into it to produce a gestureless and flat surface. After four or five layers a strongly contrasting and organic effect was achieved that mimicked the time-smoothed texture of an old wooden desk and floorboards.

The scale of the drawing meant that the desk was a life-size representation, and the angle of the drawing was such that the viewer was positioned standing at a child's height looking down on the desk. This sense of the viewer's site as placed in a life-size space is a common feature of the large drawings. The tonality of the drawing was intended to closely mimic a photograph or, more specifically, the printed-on-newsprint quality of black and white photographs by Anton Corbijn, Jill Furmanovsky, Kevin Cummins as published in the *NME* and *Melody Maker* music papers in the late 1970s. Elisabetta Fabrizi wrote of the drawing:

> Not an ironic work, the drawing plays with the overloaded melancholic feelings associated with the school desk …The drawing is not only full of melancholy in its rendering of a teenager's discovery of passion, but it is also extremely tragic, just as Joy Division's own history is.[19]

The lack of irony is a relevant point. The work was intended as both a 'fannish' tribute and an examination of such; of the desire to record a personal relationship to an obscure and subcultural phenomenon and represent it as if it was historically celebrated or iconographic.

In the act of drawing I often feel that rather than *making* I am merely *mediating* between the source image and the finished artwork, and this mediation may have a number of technical, aesthetic and intentional considerations and take a number of forms. If there is one source image, for example a press agency photograph or the work of a commercial photographer, the concern may be to simultaneously consider the content, the print quality, the paper stock the original image was disseminated upon, and the distributive context of the image. It is within this simultaneity that a compound or hybrid image emerges. Sometimes a number of printed versions of the source image are used as small nuances of contrast, tone and print quality can condition the final work.

[19] Fabrizi, *Air Guitar: Art Reconsidering Rock Music*, p. 53.



Fig 3.16 James Pyman, *The Pop Group*, 1998, pencil on paper, 114 x 228cm

For example. the pencil drawing *The Pop Group* (1998) is an image of the eponymous Bristol post-punk band from 1978. Emblematic of a potential new music emerging from the punk movement, they incorporated melodic and rhythmic elements from jazz, funk, reggae and rock and combined them with visual influences from European and avant-garde art, cinema and literature. Their non-name and anti-rock presentation were important to me as a teenage fan, and up until the mid-1990s they had been critically viewed, if at all, as a footnote in alternative culture. The band's sartorial image of loose, white linen suits and Breton tops reflected their adolescent infatuation with literary figures like Jean Genet and the Beats. As music writer Simon Reynolds has written, 'their suits evoked both a timeless, un-rock stylishness and a bracing sobriety and seriousness.'[20]

Many of the large drawings' subjects are derived from music culture, and writing and playing music are directly connected to the practice of drawing. Richard Sennett has written of this relationship that

> The tactile, the relational, and the incomplete are physical experiences that occur in the act of drawing. Drawing stands for a larger range of experiences, such as the way of writing that embraces editing and rewriting, or of playing music to explore again and again the puzzling qualities of a particular chord. The

[20] Reynolds, *Rip It Up And Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*, p. 76.

> difficult and the incomplete should be positive events in our understanding; they should stimulate us as simulation and facile manipulation of complete objects cannot.[21]

With *The Pop Group* there are visual correspondences for the 'tactile, the relational and the incomplete.' The tactility is related to the physical source for the drawing, in this instance a reprint of a photograph in the 'Where Are They Now' section of an issue of *Q Magazine*. In order to make the drawing the surface of the magazine's paper, the print quality and rescaling the image to life-size scale were all concerns to be negotiated. The 'relational' is the set of pop-cultural and biographical reference points, with the band's visual identity and ironically generic name denying any accurate historical placing of the image. The context of the group as neglected or overlooked implied by the magazine created the necessity for my visual response. The 'incomplete' could relate to the cultural impact of the group and their subsequent dissolution. The background of the drawing manipulated the line of the sea to introduce the sense of a large wave rising behind the band, rolling in to metaphorically wash the band and their memory out of history.

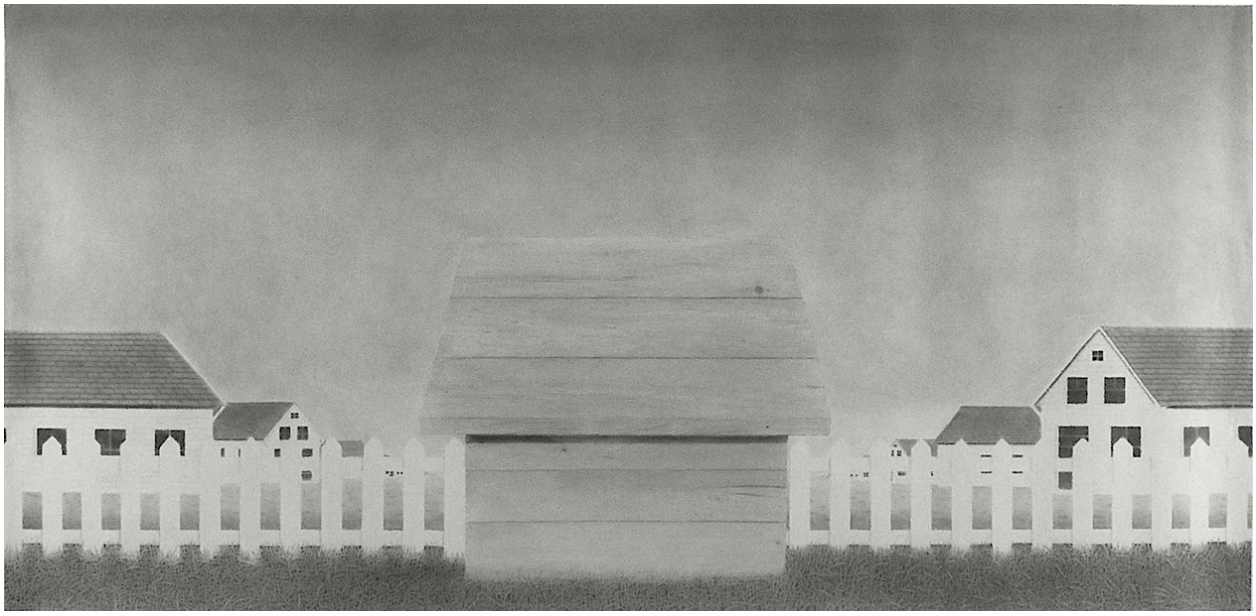


Fig 3.17 James Pyman, *Kennel*, 1998, pencil on paper, 114 x 228cm

Kennel (1998) took its visual source from Snoopy's iconic doghouse in *Peanuts*. As with *1979* and *The Pop Group*, the intention was to re-stage a moment from cultural history. However, unlike the subcultural contexts for those drawings, *Peanuts* was the world's most famous newspaper comic strip, and Snoopy's home the most recognisable structure from that world, a space 'lavishly furnished with a Wyeth, a Van Gogh, and a pool table – which Schulz carefully leaves to the reader's imagination.'[22]

[21] Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 44.
[22] Robinson, *The Comics*, p. 190.

M Thomas Inge has described Snoopy as 'the great-unread American writer'[23] in reference to the many *Peanuts* strips where the beagle is shown at his typewriter, producing such texts as 'It was a dark and stormy night.' Similarly to his authorial status, I wanted to locate Snoopy's home as a significant element of an American visual moment, the dawn of suburbia. The background buildings were inspired by the sketched rooftops and wonky fences of *Peanuts* cartoon backgrounds synthesised with photographs of Levittown, America's first suburb which was being built at the same time as *Peanuts* began in 1950. The kennel is foregrounded and iconically centred as it is when featured within the cartoon frame.



Fig 3.18 Artist unknown, *G.I. Joe* advertisement, Hasbro Toys, pub. 1967

The source image for *Capture Hill 78* came from a 1967 DC comic advert for GI Joe toys. It was a sketchily drawn cartoon of a group of boys lying on a hillside and holding toy guns. The image seems to have either been drawn from life or traced from a photograph. A striking feature is the boy second furthest from the foreground looking directly back at the reader and therefore taking in the scene from his own vantage point.

[23] Inge, *A Comics Studies Reader*, p. 97.



Fig 3.19 James Pyman, *Capture Hill 78*, 1999, pencil on paper, 114 x 228cm

My translation of the image to a monumental monochrome framed gallery work was an attempt to somehow reinvest the image with its original life-size scale and level of realistic detail. The resizing places the image at the same scale as *The Pop Group* and *Kennel*, so that viewing all simultaneously creates a sense of a series of glimpses of a hybrid space where popular culture, comics and cartoon drawings are synthesised.

The contextual specificity combined with the conflation of cultural signs and scattered visual sources of works like *1979*, *The Pop Group*, *Kennel* and *Capture Hill 78* could be seen to be problematically obscure for the viewer. However, the democratic scale, unified technique and keyword titles are an attempt to move beyond what Richard Sennett refers to as 'dead denotation' and the complexities of communicating information without *a priori* knowledge of the required skillset. Sennett writes that

> One remedy for dead denotation is to "write what you know", a piece of advice frequently given to young writers. The idea is that a person can unpack instructive meaning in experiences he or she has lived through. However, this remedy is no remedy; what you may know may be so familiar to you that you might take for granted its touchstone references, assuming that others have identical touchstones. Thus you might write of an architect, "McGuppy's slick mall resembles a Bon Jovi song." A reader in Borneo might not be able to summon up the image of a slick shopping mall and I have never heard a Bon Jovi tune. Much contemporary writing is stuffed with casual references to consumer products; in two generations, this writing will be incomprehensible. Familiarity risks producing only more dead denotation. The challenge posed by dead denotation is precisely to take apart tacit knowledge, which requires bringing to the surface

> of consciousness that knowledge which has become so self-evident and habitual that it seems just natural.[24]

Leaving aside universal concerns about longevity of work or relevance beyond the author's time, Sennett's discussion of the need to 'take apart tacit knowledge' is key. In gallery exhibitions images are placed adjacent to each other to spark possible readings. In juxtaposing particular works different relationships are drawn out relative to the contexts of the sources. One exhibition grouping was in 1999 when the following four images were shown together:



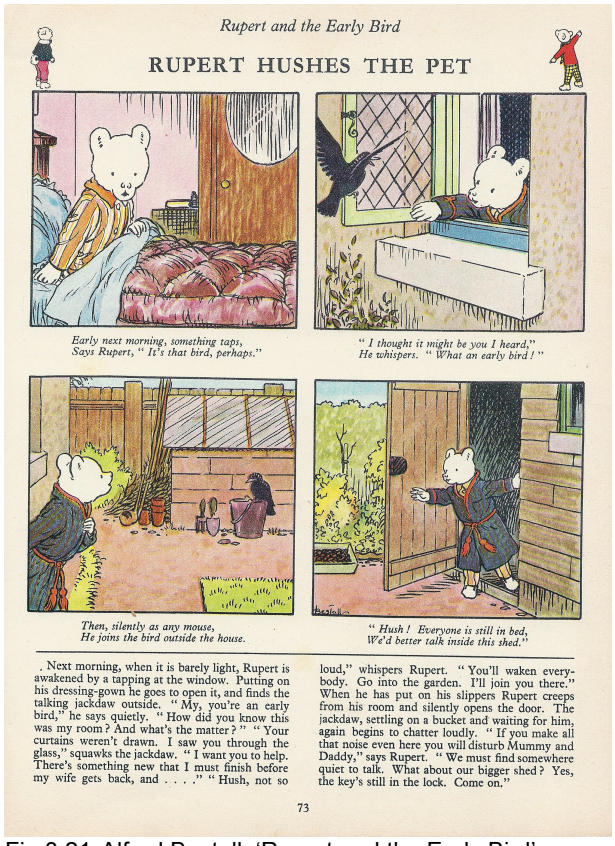
Fig 3.20 James Pyman, (clockwise from top left) *The Slits*, *Station*, *Capture Hill 78*, *Dream of Flying*, 1999, pencil on paper, each 114 x 228cm

The sources were an image of the punk band The Slits from the cover of a 1978 issue of NME, a press agency photograph of a French morse code station from 'The Guardian' newspaper with the final message issued transcribed as a subtitle, a drawing of a dream I had of an octopus climbing out of a lake into a tree, and the aforementioned *Capture Hill 78*. This grouping combined references to alternative music culture, a topical and geo-political issue, an image taken from the subconscious and a found drawing that drew on autobiography and childhood reading. Subsequent exhibitions have represented some of these with other drawings to create other possible readings of the images, and this method has continued to the present day as an ongoing strand of my practice.

[24] Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 183.

3.3 *The Adventures Of Lionel The Lion* (1997 & 2002)

In 1997 I was invited to make a small artists book for writer Tony White's 'Piece of Paper Press', 'small' because the format is a 16-page A7-size book made from a sheet of A4 paper folded and trimmed. I made a work called *The Adventures of Lionel Through The Moon* which adopted the formats of childrens' picture books, particularly *Rupert the Bear* books and illustrated adaptations of adventure novels. Both these precedents comprise a sequence of single illustrations with expositional text running underneath the images; in *Rupert* stories there was also a two-line verse that functions as an interface between the drawing and the expositional text.



Rupert and the Early Bird

RUPERT HUSHES THE PET

Early next morning, something taps,
Says Rupert, " It's that bird, perhaps."

" I thought it might be you I heard,"
He whispers. " What an early bird ! "

Then, silently as any mouse,
He joins the bird outside the house.

" Hush ! Everyone is still in bed,
We'd better talk inside this shed."

. Next morning, when it is barely light, Rupert is awakened by a tapping at the window. Putting on his dressing-gown he goes to open it, and finds the talking jackdaw outside. " My, you're an early bird," he says quietly. " How did you know this was my room ? And what's the matter ? " " Your curtains weren't drawn. I saw you through the glass," squawks the jackdaw. " I want you to help. There's something new that I must finish before my wife gets back, and . . . . " " Hush, not so loud," whispers Rupert. " You'll waken everybody. Go into the garden. I'll join you there." When he has put on his slippers Rupert creeps from his room and silently opens the door. The jackdaw, settling on a bucket and waiting for him, again begins to chatter loudly. " If you make all that noise even here you will disturb Mummy and Daddy," says Rupert. " We must find somewhere quiet to talk. What about our bigger shed ? Yes, the key's still in the lock. Come on."

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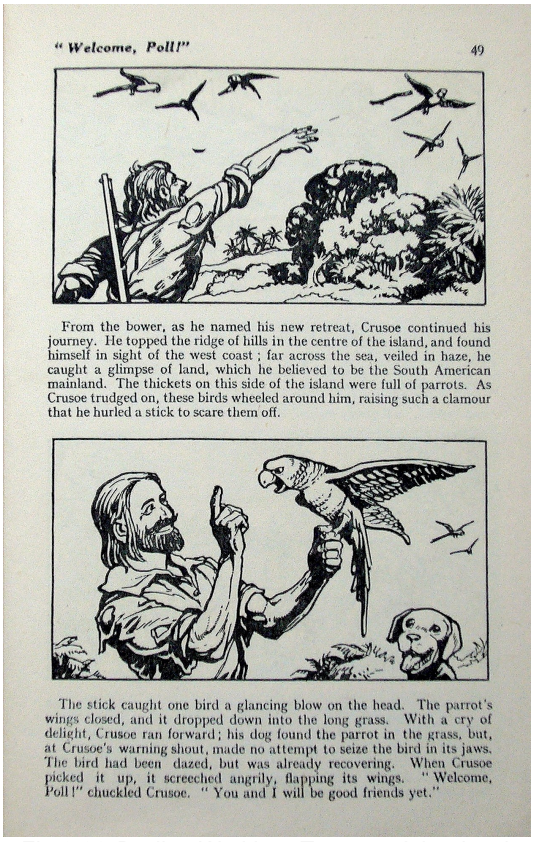
Fig 3.21 Alfred Bestall, 'Rupert and the Early Bird', pub. 1968



" Welcome, Poll!" 49

From the bower, as he named his new retreat, Crusoe continued his journey. He topped the ridge of hills in the centre of the island, and found himself in sight of the west coast ; far across the sea, veiled in haze, he caught a glimpse of land, which he believed to be the South American mainland. The thickets on this side of the island were full of parrots. As Crusoe trudged on, these birds wheeled around him, raising such a clamour that he hurled a stick to scare them off.

The stick caught one bird a glancing blow on the head. The parrot's wings closed, and it dropped down into the long grass. With a cry of delight, Crusoe ran forward ; his dog found the parrot in the grass, but, at Crusoe's warning shout, made no attempt to seize the bird in its jaws. The bird had been dazed, but was already recovering. When Crusoe picked it up, it screeched angrily, flapping its wings. " Welcome, Poll !" chuckled Crusoe. " You and I will be good friends yet."

Fig 3.22 Dudley Watkins, *Treasure Island*, pub. 1950

I had been given a *Rupert* Annual as a child, the 1968 edition with a 'Magic Pages' insert that, when you painted the monochrome full-page pictures with a wet brush, bloomed greens, purples and oranges from some chemical impregnated in the paper. I knew from the signature on each page that the *Rupert* artist was someone called 'Bestall'. I also owned a 1950 illustrated adaptation of 'Treasure Island' but I didn't then know that the illustrator was Dudley Watkins, who was also the artist of *Biffo the Bear* and who had died of a heart attack at his drawing board in 1969. I later discovered that BBC DJ John Peel had recorded a poem

describing a mole ‘not even caring if he dirtied his Rupert’s yellow trousers’ for the group Tyrannosaurus Rex that had appeared on their first album ‘My People Were Fair And Had Sky In Their Hair, But Now They’re Content To Wear Stars On Their Brows’ released in 1968. I had bought this album on a vinyl ‘twofer’ (being a cut-price, or ‘two-for’-one edition) together with their second album in 1972. By then I had also heard or read about the 1970 *Schoolkids* issue of *Oz* magazine which had been edited by sixth formers. The most notorious element of the magazine was a pornographic version of *Rupert the Bear* which was a Robert Crumb comics page doctored by replacing original character Eggs Ackley’s head with Rupert’s. Later I understood this form of irreverent collage had precedents in the work of artists such as John Heartfield and George Grosz. The strategy of overlaying one text or image over another to create a separate, more complex or layered narrative also echoed William Burroughs and Brion Gysin’s cut-up experiments and the lettrist or situationist notion of the détournement.

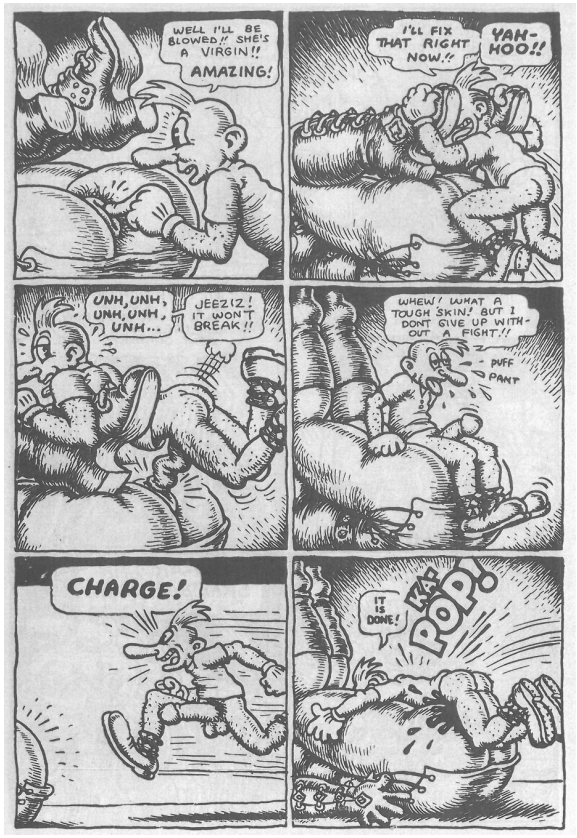


Fig 3.23 Robert Crumb, ‘Eggs Ackley Among the Vulture Demonesses,’ *Big Ass Comics* No.1, pub. June 1969

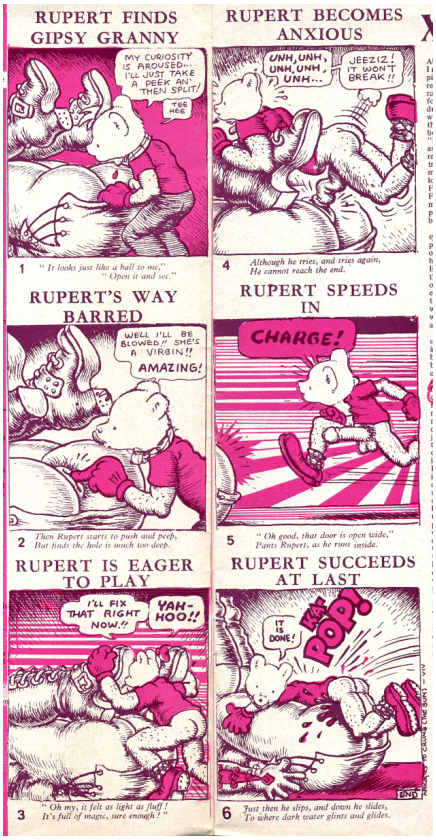


Fig 3.24 Vivian Berger, ‘Rupert Bear Parody,’ *Oz* issue 28, pub. May 1970

The intention behind *The Adventures of Lionel* was to experimentally produce a picture story that conflated the conventions of children’s quest narratives like *Rupert* stories and ‘Treasure Island’ with the ironic warping of content from works like ‘Tijuana Bibles’ and the *Oz* strip. The aim was to gradually manipulate the reader’s expectations of a standard form by introducing odd and contradictory narrative elements and increasingly stranger characters and pictorial

tropes; in essence, to generate the sense of an imaginary world of which the object in the reader's hands is only one artifact. For example, as the central characters Lionel the Lion and Slinky the Skunk meet five black crows that transport them through the moon, a footnote alludes to a previous (non-existent) adventure called 'Adrift In Sanguineland'. As the two heroes are carried towards the moon, one of the birds explains that 'What you think of as the moon is really a circular hole in the sky through which leaks the daylight from our world. Therefore we have but to fly through yon illumined disc to gain entry.' The writing adopts a pseudo-biblical, arcane vernacular and the drawings are heavily worked, with foreground textures and background landscapes rendered in ink and brushwork to a dense level of detail to reproduce an etching-like finish mimicking illustrators like Bestall, Norman Thelwell and John Tenniel.

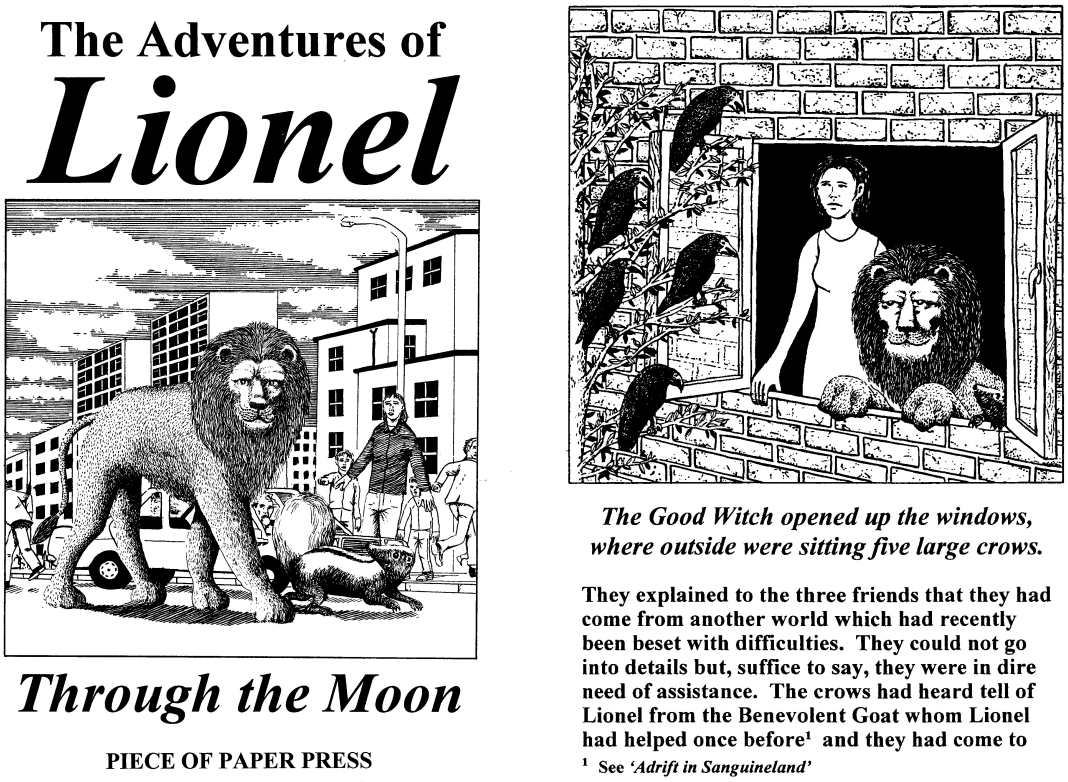


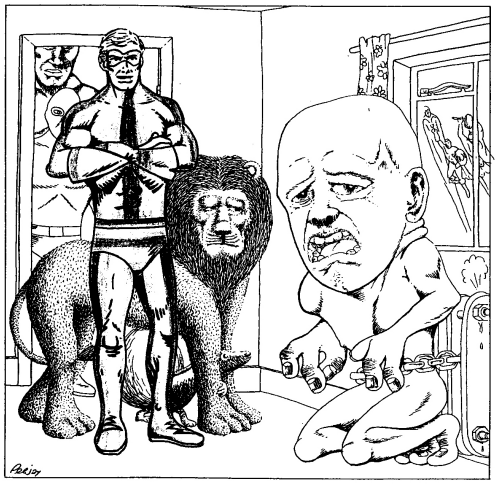
Fig 3.25 James Pyman, *The Adventure of Lionel Through the Moon* (cover & p. 3), ink on paper, 21 x 29cm, pub. 1997

This formal approach operates within what Fredric Jameson calls 'the nostalgia mode', whereby 'cultural production has been driven back inside the mind, within the monadic subject.'[25] Mark Fisher has written of monadism as the creative state where the cultural form is

[25] Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p 10.

‘saturated with a vague but persistent feeling of the past without recalling any specific historical moment.’[26]

I made a second *Lionel* story in 2002. In this sequel the focus was on the textual element of the format and adopted the trope of the ‘unreliable narrator.’ *The Book of Hours* begins in the same format as the *Through the Moon* book, but then the two-line verses continuously lengthen until they crowd out the body text. This formal dysjunction is intended to create the effect of a narrative voice spiralling out of control, of ‘speaking in tongues’, a form of poetical glossolalia or heteroglossia. This is also reflected in the image-making, principally taken from my dream diaries, which overlaid and synthesised various illustrative and comic styles.



Encountering a myriad of costumed heroes and
monsters, both outlandish and fantastic,
Our chums meet men of iron, women made from
flames, invisible things and creatures of elastic.

through them light and flames would flash down. Blasts of freezing and hot air or rain poured in as if all the elements were at war above. When they surfaced to investigate the sounds of fighting Lionel and Slinky encountered a whole group of costumed hero characters led by Captain Rainbow. He had been an ordinary, morally conflicted cold war astronaut who had flown on a secret mission during a full moon when a meteor containing magic powers from another dimension had hit his plane as it went tragically off course and accidentally flew through a rainbow. He led a group of heroes such as Regular Joe, Flag, The Fastest (grandson of Fast and son of Faster), Wargod, Absence, Red Wall & Green Wave, Keyholder and Necrobot. They (together with other groups of heroes like Meta4 and The State Agents) had been fighting a

Fig 3.26 James Pyman, *The Adventure of Lionel: The Book of Hours* (p. 6), ink on paper, 21 x 29cm, pub. 2010

In one drawing a fictional superhero team called the ‘Superheroes of America’ capture a supervillain called Babyman and chain him to a radiator. My intention was to make an image that blended various historical modes of superhero cartooning. Therefore ‘Babyman’ in the foreground is drawn in a relatively contemporaneous representational style, whereas the ‘Captain Rainbow’ character is thickly and crudely drawn, as if the thumbnail image of a character on a comic book cover had been scaled-up and placed within the scene. Background

[26] Fisher, *Ghosts of my Life*, pg. 14.

characters are drawn in approximations of other 1960s and 1970s mainstream comic techniques. The intention of this clash of registers and scales is to escalate the reader's sense of something inexplicable or inherently grotesque. The inside back cover thematically connects with this drawing and is a highly generic superhero comic, the book's cover dog-eared and torn to suggest a lack of value or interest on the part of the owner, a countering of the notion of archiving or collecting.

The *Lionel* books marked the first explicit deployment of parody and pastiche in my practice. There was a deliberate intention to manipulate pre-existing cultural forms, mimic their verbal and visual languages, and directly incorporate autobiographical concerns and childhood reading to create a hybrid form.

3.4 *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* (2004)

In 2003 I began to examine other cartoon and comics forms. *Nine Panel Grid* and the *Adventures of Lionel* books had adopted archetypal formats of comics and childrens' books respectively and used these templates to examine the form and creatively reimagine the content. I was interested in how formal concerns such as narrative structure and stylistic technique were conditioned by certain formats; that what worked within the context of a comics page would not necessarily transfer to the hierarchy of the childrens' book or the single drawing.

When I had collected newspaper strip cartoons and comic books as an adolescent I had paid no attention to newspaper editorial cartoons. This was mainly because they lacked my requirement of narrative due to being single images, but they also required a reading level of political complexity I had not possessed. The editorial cartoon spanned a wide range of approaches depending on class and demographic. Broadsheets such as 'The Daily Telegraph' and 'The Times' favoured the overtly geo-political cartoons of which James Gillray's *The Plumb-pudding In Danger* (1805) was the progenitor. These were ideogrammatic, in that politicians, public figures and other representations of nationhood, state or power were illustrated symbolically or metaphorically, and then overlaid with text or titles that clearly stated an editorial or political perspective. This iconographic approach became the American style as exemplified by cartoonist Thomas Nast.

There were also the British tabloid newspapers aimed at a lower-middle or working class demographic. In the 'Daily Mail' the cartoonist was Stanley McMurtry, whose pen-name was 'Mac', the 'Daily Mirror' contained 'The World Of Keith Waite,' and in the 'Daily Express'

cartoonist Carl Giles' work was published. Giles had produced cartoons for the 'Express' and 'Sunday Express' consistently from 1943 until 1991, and the main feature of his work, and British tabloid editorial cartoonists generally, is the emphasis on the domestic. Whereas middle or upper-class newspapers would lampoon politicians or royalty, the focus of tabloid cartoons tended to be the suburban family home, the office or the street rather than the corridors of power. In the manner of a miniaturist, Giles represented domestic responses to cultural events shaped by global forces, specifically how they affected his 'Giles Family' who feature repeatedly and comprise the bosomy mum, harried dad, mousey cousin, legion of uncontrollable toddlers, gormless snot-nosed baby and, Giles' most famous creation, the bespectacled battle-axe Grandma.



"They're signing a two-day truce with Grandma. They won't play any Christmas jokes on her if she promises she won't sing."

Daily Express, December 24th, 1968

Fig 3.27 Giles, 'Daily Express', 24th December 1968

I wanted to examine the form of the editorial cartoon within my practice. This necessitated researching its cultural, editorial and political contexts and visually analysing the verbal and visual content of the resultant cartoons. In common with newspaper serial strips the daily editorial cartoons were annually collated into Christmas gift books, and the most ubiquitous and popular collections by far were those by Giles. There were also a few themed collections focussing on Giles' war cartoons, or drawings featuring nurses, or cartoons featuring the 'Family'. The daily cartoon's significance is principally attached to its temporal and physical delivery system of the daily newspaper. Once the Giles cartoons were anthologised something

of this framework was lost. However, the annual then became another kind of artefact, a particular anthology of a sequence of unconnected events. It was this collation of a specific history that offered the potential for what Linda Hutcheon has termed 'historigraphic metafiction,' where the past is interpreted through a self-reflexive critique of the content of the source. As Hutcheon asks, 'How do some representations get legitimized and authorised? And at the expense of which others? Parody can offer a way of investigating the history of that process.'[27] Using Giles' career as a starting point, I could adopt the persona of a cartoonist who I named *Wilf* and produce a parallel history of a practitioner whose biography and concerns elided with my own within the framework of a fictional biography.

I chose one authorised Giles biography, Peter Tory's *Giles – A Life In Cartoons*, as a template to adopt for the resultant book *Wilf – A Life In Pictures*. The Tory book took the anthology format further and compressed Giles' career into a single volume, in which Tory considers the influence of cinema on Giles' approach:

> The secret of Giles' cartoons lies in his movie training – his training in animation with [Alexander] Korda and people. He draws in a panel shaped like a movie screen. His carefully built background architecture is as authentic as a naturalistic stage setting. His characters are placed on stage with directorial skill. When he shows his drawings to friends he delights in telling them what the characters have been doing up to the moment he has chosen to draw them – and what happens to them afterwards. In dreaming up a cartoon situation he imagines a complete dramatic sequence and orders his brainchildren to act it out. When they come to the climactic moment, Giles says mentally "Hold it" and proceeds to draw them.[28]

Tory is drawing a relationship between the editorial cartoon and the film or stage 'set'. However, this method also recalls Cartier-Bresson's notion of the 'decisive moment', which is 'the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression.'[29] Editorial cartoons operate as a drawn or collaged equivalent of the 'decisive moment'; the point where the joke or gag emerges from the immediate situation. Scott McCloud has discussed the relative relationship of the visual and verbal, where some comic forms are either word or picture-specific. The most resolved editorial cartoon would fit the 'interdependent' category where 'words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone.'[30]

[27] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Post-Modernism*, p. 101.
[28] Tory, *Giles: A Life In Cartoons*, p. 40.
[29] Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, pub. 1952.
[30] McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 153-155.

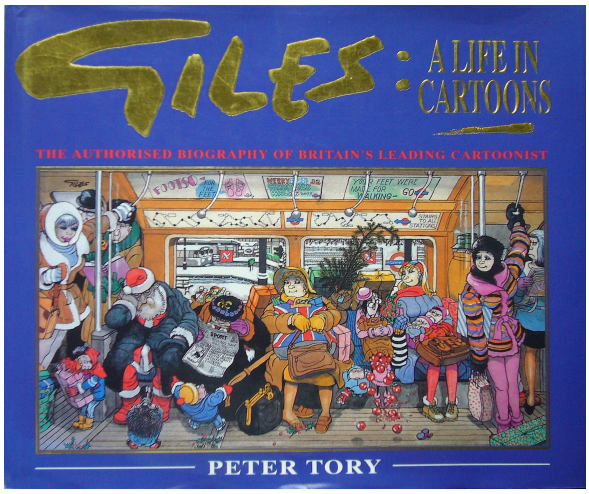


Fig 3.28 Peter Tory, *Giles – A Life In Cartoons* (cover), pub. 1992

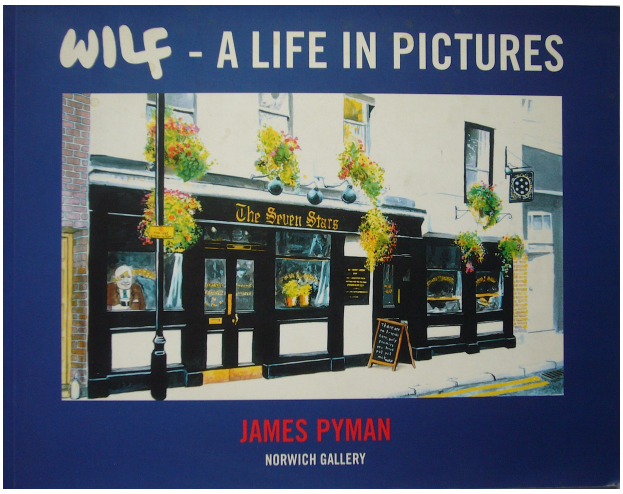


Fig 3.29 James Pyman, *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* (cover), pub. 2004

I collected, read and researched Giles' cartoon career from the 1940s to the end of his working life in 1991. The earliest wartime cartoons were compositionally simpler, crude and empty, often set in mainland Europe with bickering Nazis, a midget Mussolini and ranting Hitler. After the war and into the 1950s the landscapes were of the gas-lit bombsite and the desolate goods yard, rendered in a grisaille style. Through the 1950s an emotional warmth and visual softness enters the drawings, a post-war bucolicism and seeming delight in reassertion of family life and domestic stability. The 1960s cartoons saw him approaching his pomp, assimilating the op-art dazzle and psychedelic stylings of the era while retaining a little of the austere undercurrent of the rationing era. The long, dark 1970s of power cuts and union action was the period that personally resonated, and then in the 1980s Giles' line became looser, the drawing became simpler as little by little his abilities began to fail.

I made a timeline of subjects, characters and landscapes relevant to key historical and political occurrences from post-war Britain through to the 1990s. I then took this timeline and reframed the people and events in order to create new potential comic readings of these events. Sometimes these were a conflation of real incidents and fictional or pop-cultural figures from the period. These synthesised cartoons could obviously be read with a hindsight that Giles could not possess, and therefore an ironic or contradictory historicity could be emphasised.

Although Tory's writing style is perfunctory, present tense and almost style-less in its directness, there was a quality in this unconscious blankness of tone that was effective in conveying a neutral political position. For my *Wilf* text I invented a fictional group of newspapers that would echo the broadsheet and tabloid culture of the time; therefore the 'Daily Express' became the 'Daily Swift', the 'Daily Mirror' became the 'People's Face', and other papers and magazines were the 'Daily Account' ('Daily Sketch') and the 'Sunday Witness' ('The

Observer'). The *Wilf* cartoons appeared in the 'Daily Swift' and his first editorial cartoon, the first that I made for the book and the one that gains him a job, shows The Rolling Stones waiting outside the Old Bailey. The story derived from a judge who had publicly criticised the group, and in the cartoon they have come to the Courts to confront him. The narrative is written in the perfunctory Tory style and records 'Swift' newspaper editor Harold Phillips reminiscing about giving Wilf a commission:

> Phillips commented later: "I saw some robustness in Wilf's single cartoons which was apparently the same quality Skinner had commented upon. He would manage to bring to a single drawing the correct combination of necessary background information, the specifics of the subject and a little cartooning know-how. It sometimes wasn't too pretty but it made for a robust balance and it came off the page quickly" … Suitably satisfied, he offered Wilf an overnight job as a test. That afternoon a magistrate had called The Rolling Stones pop group 'morons' in passing during the minutiae of a court case. Phillips told Wilf to produce a cartoon on the story by ten that night and, if suitable, would be run on the night's presses for next day's paper. Wilf met Pat outside on the 'Swift's front steps. They returned to the Tipperary pub opposite to talk through the assignment. As Wilf recorded in his diary: "Pat idea for Judge to wear Beatles wig to show he's anti-Stones. Didn't make visual sense for him to wear wig on top of wig. 'The Last Time' record just out so [could] do some verbal gag around Stones being sentenced with judge wearing black hankie. Then thought we needed a stronger visual idea. Pat suggested cartoon scene the group catching up with the Judge in front of Old Bailey with punchline being that band weren't so stupid that they couldn't figure out where he worked.[31]

[31] Pyman, *Wilf – A Life In Pictures*, p. 19-27.



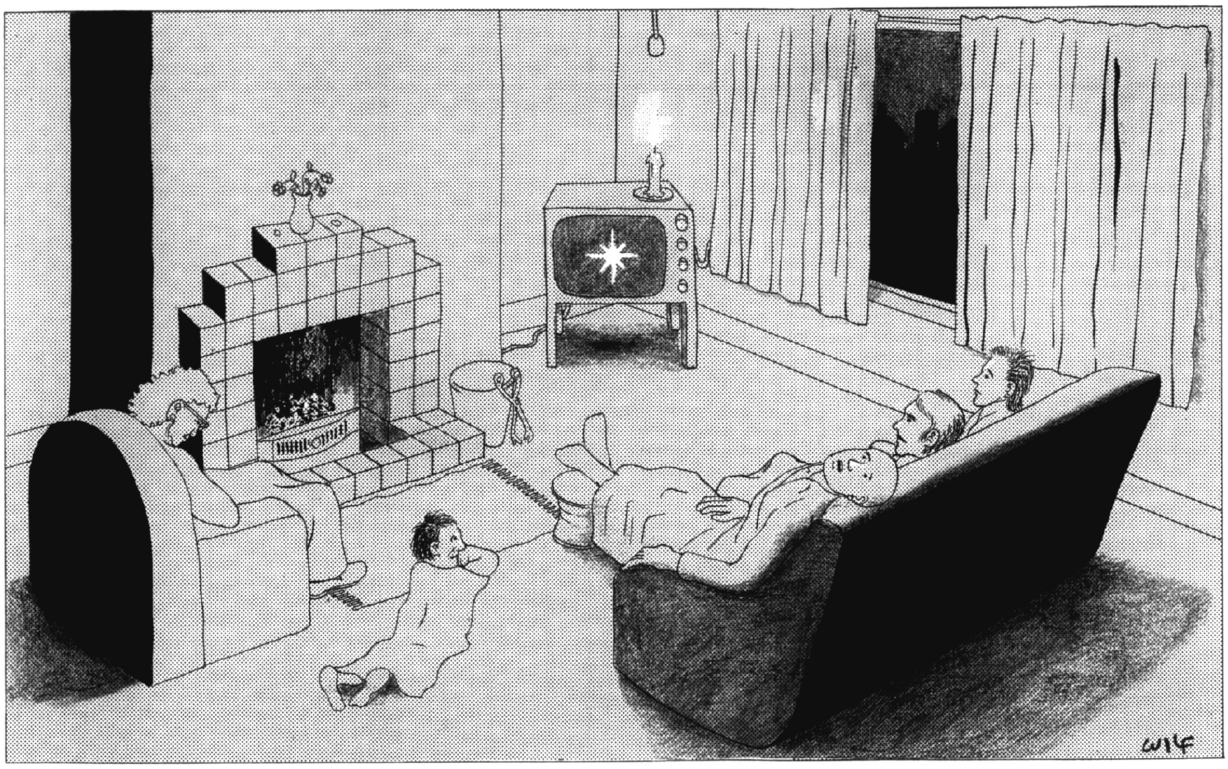
'Evidently they are not so stupid as to be unable to ascertain the whereabouts of m'learned friend's workplace.'

Daily Swift, Thursday July 2nd 1965

Wilf's first published cartoon! See page 19 for the full story of its conception.

Fig 3.30 James Pyman, *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* (pg. 16), 20 x 25cm, pub. 2004

The above capsule appraisal of Wilf's portfolio was an evaluation of my own technical abilities as an impersonator of an editorial cartoonist, and the analysis of the refining process for the final cartoon was based on my own rough ideas and sketches for the drawing. This approach informed the making of the book, where there was a meta-textual relationship between Wilf's cartoon production history and my own memories of and responses to the source material. Making the book required extensive visual research, photographing scenes like the Royal Courts, St Brides Church, the Savoy Hotel, Soho pubs, train stations and country cottages.



'Oh, well - as the talking spring with the moustache was about to say to the giant snail - 'time for bed!"

Daily Swift, Thursday February 10th 1972

Fig 3.31 James Pyman, *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* (pg. 35), 20 x 25 cm, pub. 2004

For example, this 1972 cartoon depicts my mother's sitting room with the Wilf 'family' enduring a 1972 power cut, the father sighingly stating 'Oh, well – as the talking spring with the moustache was about to say to the giant snail – 'time for bed!.' The text suggests the characters of Zebedee and Dylan from The Magic Roundabout, but, unnamed and flatly described, adds to the temporal distance and surreal dislocation of the subject.

There were parodic iterations of newspaper strip characters in *Wilf*, notably a version of *Andy Capp* called *Social Sam*. The renaming of the character was simultaneously an acknowledgement of the blunt, original pun on 'handicap' which gave Andy his name and also the dual suggestion of a life of alcohol-fuelled 'sociability' and a life on 'social security'. The *Social Sam* strips drew what comedy there was from their focus on Sam's misanthropic personality and inability to remember people or events, essentially amplifications of Andy Capp's negative personality traits. There were also strips suggested by a single example such as *The Capers*, modelled on young-marrieds strip *The Gambols*; *Lags League*, derived from *Smash!* comic's 'Handcuff Hotspurs', a serial strip about a football team comprised of prisoners; and magician detective *Darcus Toome* (a pastiche of *Smash!* Comic's Aleister Crowley-like 'Cursitor Doom'). Other strips referenced in the text were *Tom Cat* (from 'The Beano's *Billy the Cat*), *Rosetta Stone* ('Valiant's *Kelly's Eye*), and *Grunt & Groan*, a humorous

strip about a wrestling tag-team. No images were made of these strips, but the titles and brief descriptions were intended to offer the reader enough textual information to create a mental picture of a generic character or scenario.

Stephen Bury wrote of the publication that 'specific cartoon styles are referenced, particularly (Ronald) Giles of the Daily Express, and Pyman adds a hint of Surrealism and Pop Art, but, ultimately, this is a work of Conceptual Art.'[32] It was not solely my intention to produce an artists' book, but to create a biography of a cartoonist that would sit unquestioned in the 'Humour' section of second-hand bookshops and retain a level of authenticity in that context. Works like the *Adventures of Lionel* and *Wilf* books raise questions about these relationships between parody, appropriation, pastiche and homage. My work takes inspiration from the world of historical cartoons and comics, and also more recent sub-divisions of fan culture such as retroactive continuity and fan-fiction where characters or properties are re-examined in terms of context and content. Retroactive continuity, or ret-con, examines a popular character or property's history and identifies narrative gaps which are then filled by new information that forms a bridge between the original material and the fan's relationship to that material.

When completed, the material for the *Wilf* book was shown in a gallery exhibition at which the cleaner, mopping the floor the morning before the opening, remarked that he recognised the 'Clockwork Orange'-themed cartoon from when it was originally printed in the 1970s. A year or so later, I was looking at a shelf of cartoon annuals in a bookshop on Charing Cross Road when I noticed the spine of the *Wilf* book sandwiched between two old Giles books.

3.4 *The History Of 'Premier Comics'*, Creative Time (2009)

I returned to the nine-panel grid format with a commission for New York's public arts commissioner 'Creative Time' in 2009. My work was part of a project adopting the grid structure to produce a one-page narrative. As the gallery text states,

> Each of the artists was asked to address a timely issue, large or small, that was in the news, on their mind, or otherwise affecting their world … Comics look at parenthood, evolution, death and loss, cultural appropriation, consumer culture, cartoon violence, conspiracies, and the post-recession American landscape. Still others reflexively explore the language and history of comics themselves.[33]

It was the 'language and history of comics' that I addressed as, given the gallery was sited in New York, I chose to focus on the city as both a home for many superhero characters and the

[32] Bury, Art Monthly No. 280, Oct 2004.
[33] Shane Brennan, www.creativetime.org/ (Accessed 15 October 2016).

location of most of the mainstream comic publishers. In this way an imaginary space and a real urban site could be converged. The project text narrated the fictional history of a comics company called Premier Comics which was based on a real company called Atlas/Seaboard Comics.[34]

The authorial voice and layout of the two-page project was borrowed from a relatively recent type of publication, glossy magazine retrospectives of comics culture called *Comic Book Artist* and *Comicology*. These are editorially premised on a notion of celebration rather than objective critique, and it was this hagiographic tone that I adopted for the text.



Fig 3.32 James Pyman, *The History of Premier Comics*, 2009

The first page was a fragment from an implied longer text detailing the history of the fictional Premier Comics. The key part reads:

> 'In keeping with being loosely styled after the most successful comics company of the moment, each Premier title was also an imprecise corollary of its rival's product. Thus, The Living Creature was a blue-skinned version of The Hulk, Regular Joe was a flag-adorned echo of Captain America, and a purple-horned nocturnal acrobat called The Fearless Fiend was clearly a thinly-disguised derivate of Daredevil. And the roll-call of replicas went on for both heroes – The Fast (Quicksilver), Infinitesiman (Ant Man), Red Wall & Green Wave (Scarlet Witch/Vision) and villains – Il Degrado (Doctor Doom), The Factory (Ego The Living Planet) and Life-Eater (Galactus).

[34] Atlas/Seaboard began publishing in 1974 in direct competition with Marvel Comics to the extent of headhunting many writers and artists to denude Marvel of creative staff and therefore sales and business. The motivation for this was familial jealousy by Stan Lee's brother Martin Goodman who allegedly felt aggrieved by a business deal and wanted to exact revenge. Premier Comics was also the company name Caspar and I adopted for our home-made comics in the early 1970s.

> This commingling of almost-recognisable heroes and villains even extended to the plots, where themes of simulacra, deception and disguise in stories like “The Haunted Sea”, “Universe In A Mirror” and “A Cup Of Time” created a hall-of mirrors effect where the reader was uncertain which comics world was being portrayed, referenced or pastiched.’

The artwork broadly appropriated the look and style of late 1960s superhero comics artwork, particularly the atmosphere and blankness or Wally Wood’s little-remembered comic *THUNDER Agents*. Many of the invented superheroes were characters reprised or expanded from the *Lionel Book of Hours* story; as well as The Flag and Regular Joe I had compiled a long list of ersatz characters such as a pseudo-Thor called Wargod and a version of Iron Man named Puffing Billy. This implication of a more extensive parallel universe was informed by comic book precedents such as Alan Moore’s *1963* (1997) and Kurt Busiek’s *Astro City* (1995-present). Both of these writers established self-contained superhero worlds combining versions or equivalents of mainstream superheroes with extensive referencing to comics history. For instance, the superhero team The Fantastic Four became Mystery, Incorporated in *1963* and The First Family in *Astro City*. This meta-textuality presupposed a knowledge of comics history beyond most new readers, and therefore suggested a hierarchical level of understanding. My intention was to parody this notion of super-reading and attempt to communicate the initial childlike state of bewilderment through directly acknowledging the ‘real’ original sources and matching them against these debased copies. As well as referencing the real story around Atlas Comics, the text deliberately referred to notions of artifice and authenticity within both the characters and the story content.

3.7 *The Upper Mill*, Hepworth Wakefield Gallery (2012)

In 2012 the new Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield commissioned me to produce a drawing that could be printed on to fabric to envelop and protect the early 19th century Grade II-listed watermill opposite the gallery.



Fig 3.33 The existing Upper Mill building, 2011

Initially I considered adopting a number of different cartoon and comic book styles for each wall, where one would be bricks drawn in the style of an *Andy Capp* strip, another wall appropriated from a Giles cartoon, yet another from *The Perishers* and so on. After some discussion with the curators I decided to use the same technique, one that borrowed principally from the urban backgrounds of *The Perishers* with their crumbling brickwork, pockmarked surfaces and distressed urban detritus.

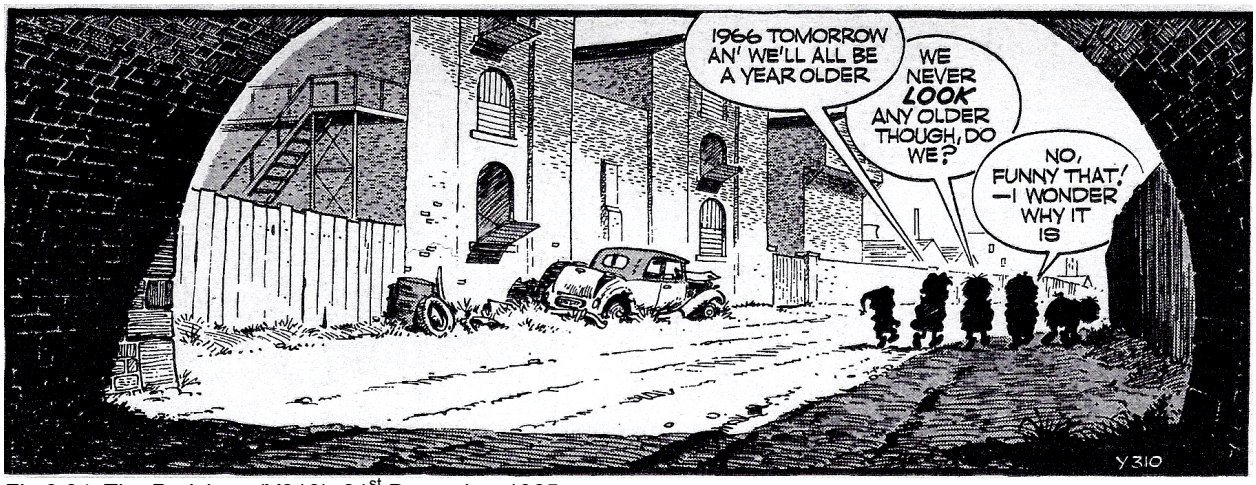


Fig 3.34 *The Perishers* (Y310), 31st December 1965

It seemed to me that detailed drawings, made with a dense tonality and high level of detail would hold scaling up from 1:100 to life size. The effect would be to site a small, two-dimensional drawing within a real landscape. I made an initial proposal sketch by

superimposing a pencil drawing over a photograph of the existing building. This was submitted to Wakefield Council for consideration and subsequent approval.



Fig 3.35 James Pyman, Photograph & Sketch Proposal for *The Upper Mill*, 2011

I then took a full photographic site survey and obtained un-dimensioned architects elevations. Piecing together and scaling off from these source documents gave me a rough sense of details such as brick, door and window sizes, and with these I drew all seven of the building's visible elevations.



Fig 3.36 James Pyman, drawings for *The Upper Mill*, approx 1:100 scale, 2011

The project was an opportunity to make portraits of original industrial materials, surfaces and textures at a miniature scale and see them reproduced at life-size scale. This process inverted the normal cartooning or comics technique, where original artwork is drawn larger for reduction when printed. In the *Upper Mill* drawings the point of a sharpened pencil dot became a coin-sized indentation in a brick when printed, and fine lines on the surface of the paper became deep scratches in the paintwork of a door.



Fig 3.37 James Pyman, *The Upper Mill* (Installation view), May 2012

Without great forethought, the project actually became a valuable exercise in transposing visual detail from one form to another, and provided insights into reconsidering and manipualting secondary source material.

Summary

The works discussed from 1994 through to 2004 demonstrate how my work has developed through different presentational contexts to become an expanded practice that still draws on an archive of comics and cartoon forms. All of the art works discussed since 2009 have been made in correspondence with thoughts and ideas developed around comics culture during the PhD research period.

Chapter Four: The 'Daily Mirror' & *The Perishers* Creators

This chapter examines the history of the 'Daily Mirror' newspaper as a laboratory for the development of the British newspaper comic strip. The 'Mirror' published a number of strips that were initially imitative of specific American strips. Where *The Perishers* was conceived of as 'the British answer to *Peanuts'*,[1] so these other strips also took existing works as their inspiration and developed to become very different strips in terms of their visual, textual and narrative properties. The various degrees of stylistic borrowing, pastiche and influence in some of these pertinent to *The Perishers* timeframe will be examined and discussed. This will locate the strip as part of an editorial and creative milieu and also substantially expands the archive of previously unpublished material.

This chapter also incudes biographical portraits of *Perishers* creators Maurice Dodd and Dennis Collins. Dodd (1922-2005) was born in London, served in the Second World War and worked as an illustrator and advertising copywriter. Through research, an interview I conducted with his son Mike and Dodd's own writing I will briefly document his childhood upbringing, wartime experiences, post-war education and family life to understand how this background inspired the textual and narrative content of *The Perishers*.

Collins (1912-1990) was the first and principal illustrator of *The Perishers*, drawing the strip from 1958 until his retirement in 1987. His biography draws on my conversations with his daughter Dr Judy Collins and documents his wartime work as a counter-intelligence forger and mapmaker, his career as a commercial illustrator and the honing of his own technical and illustrative process. The complete interviews are attached as Appendices Two & Three to the thesis. More detailed biographies are incorporated into *The Perishers Missing Strips*, a draft publication forming part of the PhD Viva exhibition as a research outcome.

[1] Hagerty, *Read All About It: 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror*, p. 242.

4.1 The 'Daily Mirror' Cartoon Strip Page

> 'British newspaper strips are virtually synonymous with the 'Daily Mirror'. Even in the darkest days of World War II, when paper shortage reduced the size of the 'Mirror' to a mere eight pages, a full page-and-a-half was given over to strips: two pages if you count the cartoons by Donald Zec, and Jack Greenall's *Useless Eustace*. If this proportion was maintained in today's 40-page paper, there would be an eight-page comic section every day!'[2]

On Wednesday 29th November 1933 the front cover of the 'Daily Mirror' featured the headline 'Trial By Fury – US Lynch Law' and a photograph of a hanged black man in the aftermath of a racially-motivated mob attack on an American prison. This was the high-impact approach of new editor Guy Bartholomew and marked the beginning of today's British tabloid style. Bartholomew had been working intermittently for the 'Mirror' since 1904 and was described by 'Mirror' advertising director Cecil King as 'a good photographer, a great picture editor, had a great understanding of strip cartoons and was full of ideas – most of them bad.'[3] Bartholomew had also been attached to the 'New York Daily News', which at its inception in 1919 had borrowed its tabloid format from the 'Daily Mirror' and was known for its large comics section created by Captain Joseph Patterson who commissioned many strips including Sidney Smith's *The Gumps*, Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*, Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* and Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates.* All of these to some degree influenced subsequent strips in the 'Daily Mirror'. Indeed, Gifford noted that when Bartholomew returned he 'was inspired by American newspaper methods and anxious to introduce more strips.'[4] 'Mirror' cartoonist Steve Dowling later confirmed that:

> Old Guy Bartholomew who was chairman of the Mirror was mad about strips. Having been an artist himself he regarded the strips as the main part of the paper. His opinion was that most people couldn't read, anyway, and liked looking at pictures![5]

Under Bartholomew's editorship sales rose. When he published the 'hanged man' photograph daily sales were below 800,000, but six years later they had nearly doubled to 1.5million copies.[6] Gifford also notes that although Bartholomew was a strong advocate of cartoon strips, 'Mirror executive Basil D Nicholson is credited with the development of the paper's strip stable.'[7] According to Hugh Cudlipp, Nicholson had 'little knowledge of newspapers but was brimming with populist ideas and a conviction that strip cartoons were an important weapon in

[2] Gifford, *The International Book of Comics*, p. 36.
[3] Hagerty, *Read All About It: 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror*, p. 39.
[4] Horn, *The World Encyclopedia Of Comics* p. 498.
[5] Interview with Gifford, *Ally Sloper* No. 1, p. 3.
[6] Curran & Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, p. 56-57.
[7] Gifford, *The International Book of Comics*, p. 36.

the circulation war.'[8]

According to 'Mirror' biographer Bill Hagerty, 'the brilliant but hard-drinking Nicholson had uncompromising views about editorial content and the readership, believing a diet of strip cartoons and frivolity was all the masses needed.'[9] Steve Dowling had a lower opinion of his editor, and said that Nicholson's idea of a comic strip was 'to have a different person every day slipping on a banana skin! One day a clergyman, the next day a policeman: he thought that was the level of public understanding!'[10]

It took the Second World War to formalise the 'Daily Mirror' strip page. On Monday 4th September 1939, the day after war was declared, the newspaper's strips were scattered across the whole paper, each one isolated on its own page. By Wednesday 6th September most of the strips were 'stacked' on one page. One possible reason for this decision was that the tone of the paper overall had demonstrably darkened, news was breaking quickly and editorial space (or 'real estate') needed to be rationalised. Also, although whimsical or light-hearted material was essential for wartime morale and a sense of continuity, it may have felt necessary to corral most of this material in one place. Wartime paper rationing limiting the newspaper to eight pages could also have been a factor.

The American origin of the stacked comics page has been detailed by comics historians Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams:

> On January 31, 1912, Hearst introduced the nation's first full daily comic page in his *New York Evening Journal*, adding it to his other afternoon papers from coast to coast a few days later. Initially made up of four large daily strips, the Hearst page expanded to five, then six, and finally nine daily strips through the teens and early twenties. Other papers emulated the Hearst example, and by the 1920s the phenomenon was to be found in hundreds of newspapers around the country, fed by dozens of daily strips distributed by a multitude of small syndicates.[11]

It could therefore be that the editorial decision to corral the strips together was one that was mimicking the popular American page design, but the timing of the change suggests there was some awareness of public mood.

[8] Hagerty, *Read All About It: 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror*, p. 41.
[9] Hagerty, *Read All About It: 100 Sensational Years of the Daily Mirror*, p. 41.
[10] Interview with Gifford, *Ally Sloper* No. 1, p. 3.
[11] Blackbeard & Willis, *The Smithsonian Book of Newspaper Comics*, p.



Fig 4.1 'Daily Mirror', 6th September 1939 - The first instance of the page dedicated exclusively to comic strips.

At the end of the war the 'Daily Mirror' content was 16% dedicated to puzzles and cartoon strips, the highest of any British newspaper, and 30 years later in 1976, although down to 10% of the overall newspaper, it was still 2% higher than its nearest rival 'The Sun.'[12]

To understand the editorial and historical context of *The Perishers* I will now briefly examine the key 'Daily Mirror' comic strips. Most of these were published just before or were contemporaneous with *The Perishers*. Very little critical consideration has been given to most of these strips beyond a few paragraphs in a handful of comics surveys and brief Wikipedia entries.

[12] Curran & Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, p. 98-99.

***Pip, Squeak And Wilfred* (12th May 1919-9th March 1955)**

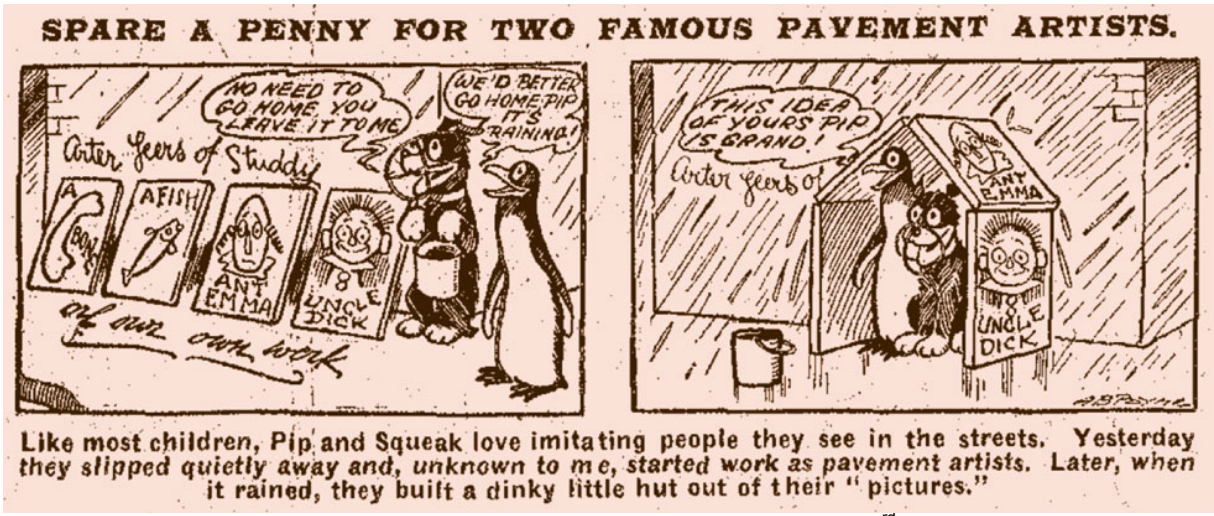


Fig 4.2 *Pip, Squeak & Wilfred* by Bertram Lamb & Austin Payne, 'Daily Mirror', 23rd August 1919

The creation of writer Bertram Lamb and initially drawn by Austin Payne, *Pip, Squeak and Wilfred* was a genuine British newspaper comic strip phenomenon.[13] Aimed squarely at children, the strip's three animal characters were leader Pip the dog, Squeak the female penguin and Wilfred the rabbit 'child'. Their origins were revealed as the strip developed:

> Squeak was found in the London Zoological Gardens after hatching on the South African coast years before. Pip was discovered begging by a policeman on the Thames Embankment, and was sent to a dogs' home, where he was bought for half-a-crown. Wilfred was found in a field near to his burrow and was adopted by Pip and Squeak, who were in turn looked after by Uncle Dick and Angeline, the housemaid of their family house on the edge of London.[14]

The content of the strip is similar to many British 'talking animal' newspaper strips which began with *Teddy Tail* and ran from *Rupert* through to Old Boot in *The Perishers*. The characters display anthropomorphic characteristics; they walk upright, wear clothes and drive cars, operate cameras, visit shops and live as a family in a country house called Mirror Grange. The format is closer to strips like *Tiger Tim* and *Rupert the Bear* than American comic strips; as well as panels with images and speech balloons, lines of expositional text run underneath the strip; this narrative 'voice' is authoritative in the manner of a teacher or nanny who contextualises and moralises. The strip was heavily merchandised; in 1922 a series of animated films were produced, and annual books appeared from 1923 to 1939. A fan club called the 'Wilfredian League of Gugnuncs' (or the 'WLOG') gained 350,000 members within 5 months of launching

[13] *Ally Sloper* is generally considered to be the first British comics character. The creation of Charles H Ross in 1867 and published in *Judy* magazine, he is the British equivalent to R F Outcault's cartoon creation The Yelow Kid, both seen as cartoon expressions of the archetypical urban lower-class urchin or vagrant.
[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pip,_Squeak_and_Wilfred (Accessed 12 October 2016).

and at its peak of popularity in 1928 a rally for 8,000 children was held at the Royal Albert Hall. The characters' names were attributed to a series of medals during the Great War, and in 1930 a large dolls house of Mirror Grange was built and toured Sussex to raise money for charity. Lamb dressed up live animals as the characters and toured them in pantomime and public seaside performances. The strip took a wartime hiatus from 1940 until 1947 when it resumed weekly publication until ending in 1955.

4.2 *Jane* (5th December 1932- 10th October 1959)

Another hugely successful strip both domestically and overseas, and better remembered than most 'Mirror' strips due to its popularity with adults and a 1980s revival in newspapers and on TV, *Jane* began in 1932 and was initially called *Jane's Journal or the Diary of a Bright Young Thing*. The strip documented the lightly erotic adventures of a young woman and, although not specifically imitative of any American strips, was in the mould of 1920s 'flapper' strips such as cartoonist Russ Westover's *Tillie the Toiler*. A notable feature of *Jane* was creator Norman Pett's working process of sketching a succession of nude artists' models from life for the strip's imagery, most famously Crystobel Leighton-Porter, who he discovered working in a Birmingham telephone exchange, and who Pett drew at his Cotswolds cottage while his wife acted as 'chaperone.'



Fig 4.3 *Jane*, Norman Pett, 'Daily Mirror', 19th October 1943

Jane is also unusual in being the inspiration for an American strip when in 1942 *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon* comics artist Milton Caniff created *Male Call*, its central character Miss Lace a wartime 'tonic' for the US GI troops. Although his version had no nudity, Caniff's sensuous style and Miss Lace's dark movie-star eroticism made *Male Call* a markedly edgier property than its progenitor's prim coyness.

Pett drew *Jane* until 1948, moving on to create 'cheesecake' strips for other newspapers and, surprisingly, work for childrens comics. After he left the strip it was continued by assistants until it ended in 1959, weeks before *The Perishers* began publication.

The Ruggles (11th March 1935-3rd August 1957)



Fig 4.4 *The Ruggles* first appearance, 'Blik' (a.k.a. Stephen & Frank Dowling), 'Daily Mirror', 11th March 1935

Steve Dowling drew more 'Mirror' strips than any other freelancer, but began his first commission in 1931 in one of the strangest comics career accessions when he replaced a deceased colleague or, as he elaborated in 1976,

> It started by my going riding with a friend who did a strip called *Tich* … the ideas for which were supplied by my brother, Frank. Coming back from this event, rather full of liquor, unfortunately there was a car accident and the artist, Martin, died. And so I had to step into his shoes and was plummeted into the strip business in a rather shaky condition, having gone through the roof of a car! [15]

Tich was a wordless, or 'pantomime' strip which ran until 1933. From there journeyman Dowling moved to *The Ruggles* who as he acknowledged were modelled on American strips such as Sidney Smith's *The Gumps*, a soap-opera strip about an ordinary working-class Chicago family:

> I think having seen American continuity strips I got the idea for this character John Ruggles, an ordinary chap, and my brother, who had quite a gift for humorous writing, wrote the words. In point of fact, I think that *Ruggles* was the first continuity strip to appear in a national daily. The others were all daily incidents. The idea of having a serial story run in picture form was new in this country, although, of course, it had been done in America. I remember Cecil King, who was rather small fry then, always wanted me to make Ruggles build a shed in his garden, because his 14-year old son had suggested the idea! If I had taken King's advice Ruggles' garden would have been so stiff with sheds that he wouldn't have been able to move.[16]

[15] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.
[16] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.

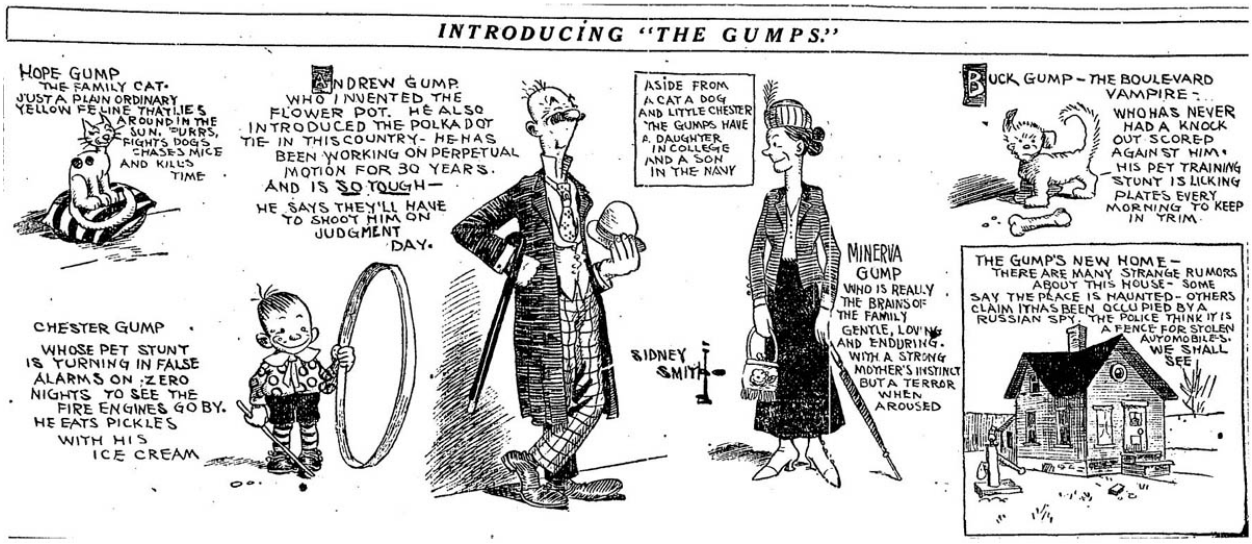


Fig 4.5 *The Gumps* first appearance, Sidney Smith, 'New York Daily News', 12th February 1917

Comics historian Ron Goulart has described lead character Andy Gump as 'a long-nosed, chinless fellow with a squiggly moustache,'[17] also an apt description of John Ruggles. *The Ruggles* were solidly working-class, and their adventures rotated around concerns such as running out of clean shirts and thence washing them while in the bath through to building their own air raid shelter. A more unusual aspect of the strip developed after the war, as Maurice Horn noted:

> Suddenly, Ruggles turned to face his readers and said "Look out for us on page two. We're taking a trip to Margate on the *Royal Eagle* and we're going to see if you're aboard!" For the first time a cartoon hero stepped into reality – or vice versa – and the real life Mrs. Pearson and family found themselves featured in a strip! Although Ruggles's "meet the people" was a new idea, and certainly worked for a while, the actual readership appreciation fell, and the strip was killed on August 3, 1957.[18]

[17] Goulart, *The Funnies*, p. 39.
[18] Horn, *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, p. 665.



Fig 4.6 *The Ruggles*, Steve Dowling, 'Daily Mirror', 19th October 1948

George Perry has described the format as 'a kind of cartoon Citizen's Advice Bureau. Its informative descriptions of the workings of local government and social services were considerably more assimilable than the usual advice columns.'[19] Dowling noted he was inspired by other media but that 'Mirror' Editor Philip Zec was less inclined to acknowledge his input:

> Wilfred Pickles on the radio was then 'Meeting the People' and I thought I would try this in strip form. I took some roughs into Zec, who didn't think much of the idea. He took it to the Chairman, and next day I got a telegram from Zec: "Please draw some more along the line I suggested!" Well, I did, and Zec got into trouble for claiming it was his idea: it became the Chairman's idea! But I must say that the idea eventually reverted to me, when they found the series didn't go down very well.

When asked why the strip came to an end, the forthright Dowling noted of editorial that 'they felt it wasn't pulling. They asked for letters and, of course, more people will write and say they don't like a thing than those who do, so *Ruggles* went.'[20]

[19] Perry, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, p. 204.
[20] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.



Fig 4.7 The last *Ruggles* strip, Steve Dowling, 'Daily Mirror', 3rd August 1957

Belinda (13th September 1935-17th October 1959)

Originally titled *Belinda Blue-Eyes*, the lead character was 'a perpetual waif, a British counterpart to the transatlantic *Little Orphan Annie*.'[21] In 1924 cartoonist Harold Gray had developed a strip proposal about a curly-haired orphan boy called Otto on the advice of *Gumps* creator Sidney Smith and had taken the samples to 'New York Daily News' editor Captain Patterson whose direction was 'The kid looks like a pansy to me … Put a skirt on him and we'll call it *Little Orphan Annie*.'[22] The first *Annie* strip introduced her as a child in an orphanage being victimised and tortured, and Jerry Robinson described Gray's strip as 'an unabashed tearjerker' with 'a pathos comparable to that in Pinocchio's search for Geppetto.'[23] *Annie* was published until 2010, and her picaresque adventures have been syndicated worldwide and spawned musicals, hit records and feature films.

Debuting 11 years after Gray's strip, *Belinda Blue-Eyes* is heavily indebted to her American forerunner, her speech peppered with 'gee', 'li'l' and 'sorta's. She also has her own versions of Annie's dog Sandy and bald arms-dealing doting benefactor Daddy Warbucks in pet Scrounger and Daddy Pilgrim. The publication of the strip coincided with Annie's most successful and critically acclaimed period, and presumably this provided the 'Mirror' with the commercial incentive to produce their own version.

[21] Perry, *The Penguin Book of Comics*, Penguin: London, 1971, p. 204.
[22] Harvey, 'The Orphan's Epic', http://www.tcj.com/the-orphans-epic/ (Accessed 28 August 2016).
[23] Robinson, *The Comics*, p. 88.



Fig 4.8 *Belinda*, 'Gloria' (a.k.a. Bill Connor & Steve Dowling), 'Daily Mirror', 12th October 1937

Creator Dowling said of ending his stint drawing the strip and the subsequent move to *Garth* in 1943, 'I had been writing and drawing *Belinda* and not enjoying it very much. Then they found another artist, Tony Royle, to take it on, so they asked me to produce another strip in order to justify my salary.'[24] This is symptomatic of the 'journeyman' status of many British cartoonists relative to their American counterparts.

Royle drew *Belinda* until its end in October 1959, and his style was more realistic than Dowling's, the wartime and post-war London scenes having an authentic urban naturalism, although Belinda's personality remained the awestruck ingénue throughout. *Belinda* lost its place on the cartoon page to *The Perishers*, and the final strip shows her leaving her work as a waitress in a French café with father-figure Daddy Pilgrim's advice that 'now you've got to learn to grow up – like a young English lady!'



Fig 4.9 The final *Belinda*, Bill Connor & Steve Dowling, 'Daily Mirror', 17th October 1959

Buck Ryan (22nd March 1937-31st July 1962)

Detective strip *Buck Ryan* was created as 'a stopgap replacement for *Terror Keep*, a serial strip adapted by writer Don Freeman and artist Jack Monk from Edgar Wallace's *Mr Reeder* novel,

[24] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.

when an American syndicate claimed all rights to Wallace's book.[25] 'Mirror' Editor Bartholomew asked Freeman and Monk for a substitute strip 'in the style of America's successful *Dick Tracy*.'[26]

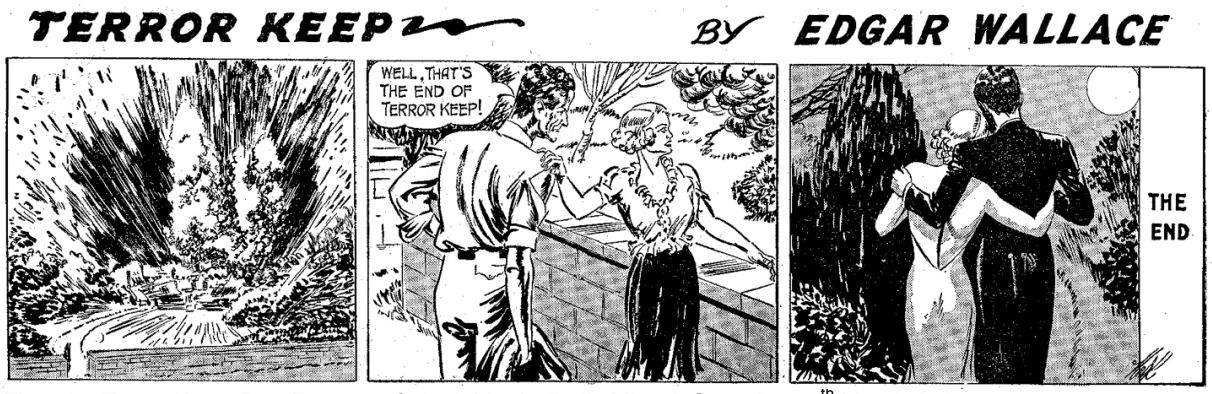


Fig 4.10 *Terror Keep*, Don Freeman & Jack Monk, 'Daily Mirror', Saturday 20th March 1937

Terror Keep does appear to have been rushed to conclusion. The last three panel strip has a large explosion in the first panel, the lead character's announcement 'Well, that's the end of Terror Keep!' in the second, and the two principals have hurriedly changed into evening dress and lean together in the moonlight in the final panel.

Nevertheless, for a 'stopgap' *Buck Ryan* still ran for 25 years. Inspiration *Dick Tracy* was a hugely successful cops and robbers strip begun in October 1931 and subsequently adapted into live action cinema serials, animated cartoons and appropriated in Andy Warhol paintings and Art Spiegelman's comics. Jerry Robinson has noted that 'Gould introduced a new, hard-hitting type of realism dealing with contemporary themes. It marked a radical and historic departure: The comics became a misnomer; the comics were no longer just funny.'[27] Gould's strip was highly stylised, cartoon-like and relied on a vivid colour palette; as Spiegelman has noted, 'Gould understood better than anyone that comic strip drawing isn't really drawing at all, but rather a kind of diagramming.'[28] There is little commonality with *Buck Ryan* but, given that a successful *Dick Tracy* film serial was made and shown in 1937, conceivably this was the visual inspiration as much as Gould's comic strip.

[25] Gifford, *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, p. 161.
[26] Gifford, *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, p. 161.
[27] Robinson, *The Comics*, p. 128.
[28] Carlin, *Masters of American Comics*, p. 74.

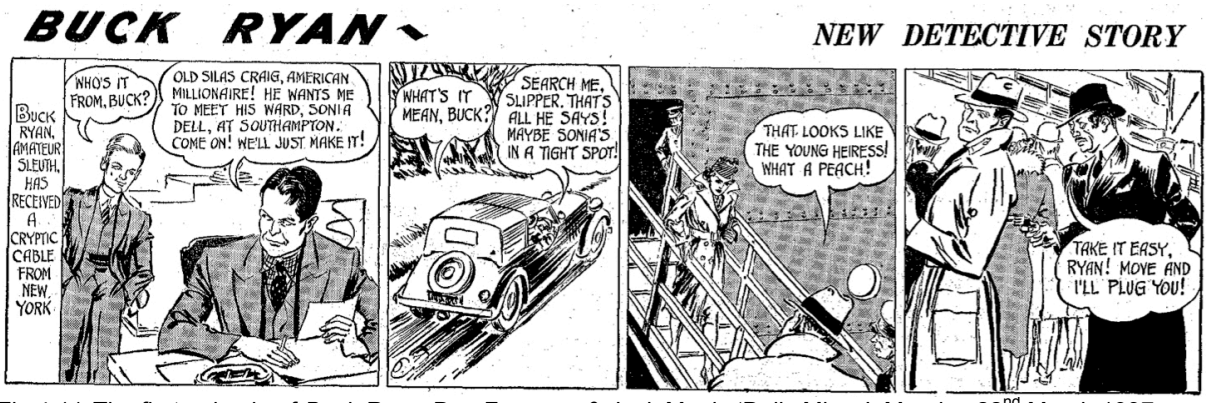


Fig 4.11 The first episode of *Buck Ryan*, Don Freeman & Jack Monk, 'Daily Mirror', Monday 22nd March 1937

The first *Buck Ryan* strip is a fast-paced and visually unconnected assemblage of images, almost as if a sample strip has been rushed into print rather than the introduction to an anticipated long-running narrative. The dialogue is default American hardboiled jargon with asides to 'a peach' of a woman and a threat to 'plug' Ryan. However, once the strip develops, the stark, stylised use of large areas of shadow, the stilted, aggressive dialogue and bursts of gruesome violence give it a very English *noir* sensibility.



Fig 4.12 *Buck Ryan*, Don Freeman & Jack Monk, 'Daily Mirror', 6tn January 1960

In the first panel of a 1960 story called 'Number One' a Jamaican supporting character called 'Darkie' asks Ryan if he has a 'tosheroon' (or a crown in old money) as he has just spent 'a pontoon in the ville' (a period of 21 months, presumably in Pentonville prison) and warns Ryan that 'Two flatties are watchin yer' ('flatfoots', or beat bobbies). The persistent use of slang mixed with vividly sketched London street scenes of bricked-up terrace windows and awning-darkened shopfronts create a densely urban atmosphere.

Dick Tracy was notable for its supposed violence, but its highly graphic style and cartoon sensibility mitigate against a visceral response from the viewer. However, from 1952 *Buck Ryan* is increasingly dark in subject matter and aesthetic. In the final story 'The Bomber' the

aftermath of explosions is shown in graphic, shocking detail, the chaos in the street scenes juxtaposed with peoples' responses rooting the horror in the everyday.



Fig 4.13 *Buck Ryan*, Don Freeman & Jack Monk, 'Daily Mirror', 10th April 1962

Buck Ryan was rare among British cartoon strips in being exported to America where it was published in the 'New York Star', and it is also still published in Thailand by Muthu Comics under the pseudonym *Detective Julian*.

Just Jake (4th June 1938-14th April 1952)

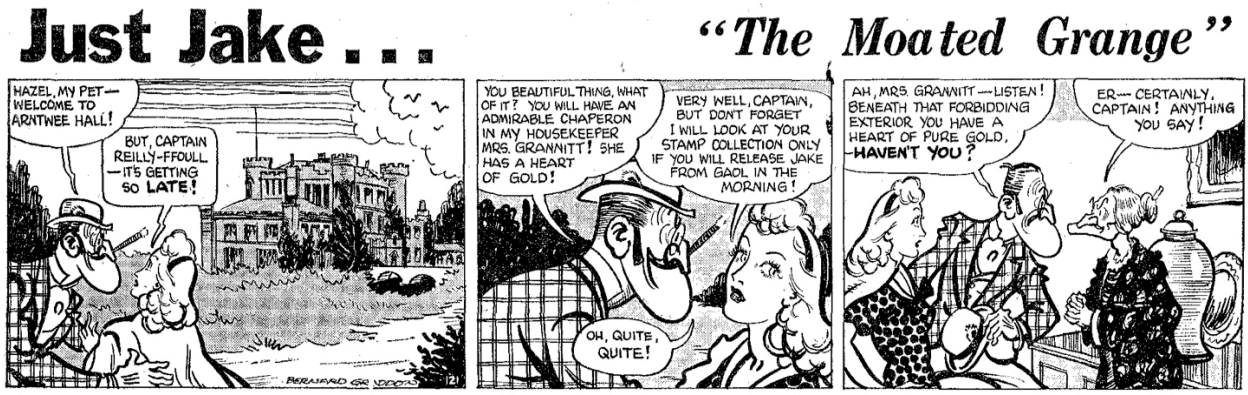


Fig 4.14 *Just Jake*, Bernard Graddon, 'Daily Mirror', 19th October 1938

Just Jake was created by Bernard Graddon and began in June 1938. Initially based on American cartoonist Al Capp's strip *Li'l Abner* , the titular Jake was a 'hayseed hero'[29] in the style of Abner but was the focus of the strip only for the first year when, according to Gifford, attention shifted to 'that stap-me squire of Arntwee Hall, Much Cackling, Captain A. R. P. Reilly-Ffoull of the Gallopin' Gertshires.'[30] The painful punning aside, Reilly-Ffoull was a prototypical RAF pilot caricature of the type popularised in TV and film by Terry-Thomas or Jimmy 'Whack-o' Edwards, winking and leering semi-drunkenly while twirling a moustache. The clearest

[29] Gifford, *The International Book of Comics* p. 36.
[30] Gifford, *Stap Me – The History of the British Newspaper Comic Strip*, p. 21.

borrowing from *Lil Abner* are the characters of Daisy and Maida Grannitt who bear a striking resemblance to Capp's Daisy Mae and Mammie Yokum.

The strip ceased publication after Graddon died from pneumonia contracted after a 'Daily Mirror' Christmas office party in 1951.

Garth (24th July 1943-8th February 1997)

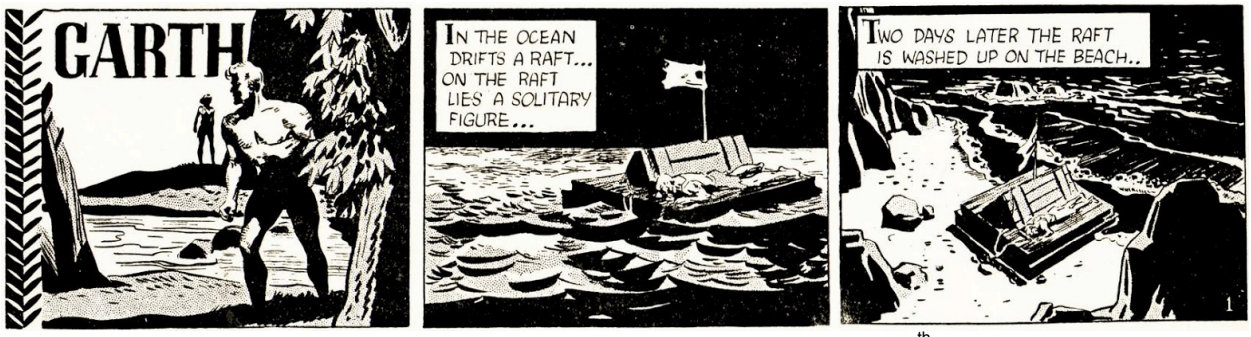


Fig 4.15 The first episode of *Garth*, Gordon Boshell & Steve Dowling, 'Daily Mirror', 24th July 1943

In the same manner as many other 'Mirror' strips were imitations of American strips, Steve Dowling's *Garth* is considered to have been produced in response to the success of *Superman*, although creator Steve Dowling notes that Milton Caniff's adventure strip and eastern mysticism were also inspirations:

> [Caniff's] *Terry and the Pirates* was my great influence, if anything. I was rather interested in Tibet, and the Forbidden City, and the magic that was there. For instance, in the beginning Garth was resuscitated by the 'kiss of life' from a rather attractive young woman called Gala. Well, the 'kiss of life' was not known here then, but I had read about it in a book on Tibet.[31]

Gifford's capsule origin describes him as 'a musclebound hunk of a hero who came drifting in from the sea,'[32] although in the 1970s his origin was amended to having been 'washed ashore in the Shetlands in a tiny coracle as a small child, then pulled out of the sea by an old couple who adopted him and brought him up (strengthening the Superman parallel!).'[33] Garth's precise origin remained a mystery for as Dowling notes, 'I had no more idea who Garth was than the reader!'[34] Of his creation, Dowling has ironically noted that 'it took me about three months to think up *Garth* and draw the first three weeks' strips. The chairman thought that was rather too long – so he docked my pay!'[35]

[31] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.
[32] Gifford, *The International Book of Comics*, p. 36.
[33] https://web.archive.org/web/20120904042348/http://www.internationalhero.co.uk/g/garth.htm (Accessed 15 October 2016).
[34] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.
[35] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, p. 4.

one notable story was 1964's 'The Rebels' which imagined an alternate history where the Nazis were victorious. This was the first comic story to posit this scenario and was published between Philip K Dick's novel 'The Man In The High Castle' (1962) and the Star Trek TV episode 'The City On The Edge of Forever' (1967), both considered landmark examples of the sub-genre.

Garth gained its own pastiche from 1969 in the 'Sun' newspaper strip *Scarth AD 2195*. The lead character and, unusually, both writer and artist were female. The graphic style was more psychedelic and art nouveau as befitted the era and the subject matter was in the manner of contemporaneous pseudo-erotic films like 1968's 'Barbarella,' itself an adaptation of a successful French comic strip.

Dowling left the strip in 1969 and in a frank assessment of 'Mirror' self-employment policy confirmed that his departure was not his choice: 'I had to. I was freelance up to 1949. Then I joined the staff to get a pension, and when I reached the age of 65 I had to go. That was the rule, so I went.'[36] He was subsequently replaced by highly-regarded British strip artists Frank Bellamy and Martin Asbury.

The Flutters (7th July 1947-27th February 1971)

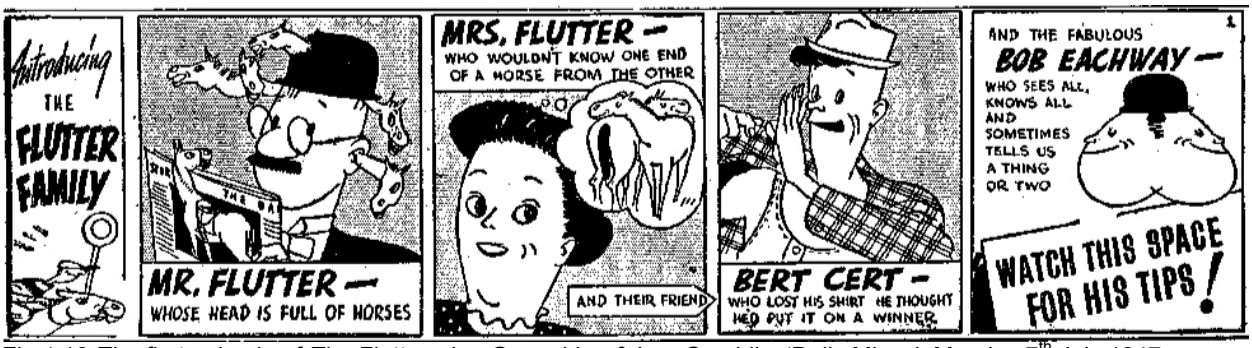


Fig 4.16 The first episode of *The Flutters*, Ian Gammidge & Len Gamblin, 'Daily Mirror', Monday 7th July 1947

The Flutters is in probably the oldest tradition of newspaper comic strips, that of the sporting page sequential strip begun with Hal Fisher's *Mutt & Jeff* in 1907. Fisher's strip was produced the day before publication and often featured tips for the following days horseraces.

The Flutters' main characters were gamblers Mr & Mrs Flutter and their lodger Bert Cert who spoke in rhyming couplets. The strip was a humorous soap-opera revolving around sports, betting and horses, and the daily strip's final panel featured a drawing of Janus-faced resident tipster Bob Eachway with the day's favourite and odds set in type at the last moment of

[36] Interview Gifford with Dowling, *Ally Sloper No. 1*, 1976.

printing. The strip ran for nearly 25 years before being replaced by another humorous soap-opera in Bill Tidy's *Fosdyke Saga*, a northern-set proletarian pastiche of TV programme 'The Forsyte Saga.'

***Romeo Brown* (1954-1963)**

Romeo Brown was written by Peter O'Donnell and drawn by Dutch cartoonist Alfred Mazure untuil 1957 and from then until 1963 by Jim Holdaway. *Romeo Brown* was a light-hearted adventure strip supposedly starring 'a dashing private detective and ladies man'[37] although Romeo is mostly an astonished naïf out of his depth in a similar fashion to Al Capp's character *Li'l Abner*. During the early years of *The Perishers* publication *Romeo Brown* was printed immediately underneath, unusually as the latter strip was fairly saucy by newspaper standards with a lot of mild titillation and women in lingerie. There is a sub-genre of comics culture known as GGA, an abbreviation of 'Good Girl Art,' and *Romeo Brown* fits this description more than any other 'Mirror' strip. Where *Jane*'s partial nudity had for the most part a wholesome and chaste style, Holdaway's drawings of women are especially erotic, graphically slick and stylish in the 'New Realist' manner of American strips like Leonard Starr's *On Stage* or Stan Drake's *The Heart of Juliet Jones*. Indeed, Holdaway's widow Chip noted that the strip ended because 'new management considered the female pulchritude on offer too risqué.'[38]



Fig 4.17 *Romeo Brown*, Peter O'Donnell & Jim Holdaway, 'Daily Mirror', 31st December 1959

When *Romeo Brown* ended in 1963 O'Donnell and Holdaway moved on to create the hugely popular female spy character *Modesty Blaise* for the 'Evening Standard', which achieved international success, syndication, many subsequent reprints and film adaptations.

[37] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_Brown (Accessed 17 October 2013).
[38] Chip Holdaway, 'A Tribute to Jim Holdaway', http://www.crimetime.co.uk/features/jimholdaway.php (Accessed 15 July 2016).

***The Larks* (5th August 1957-28th February 1985)**

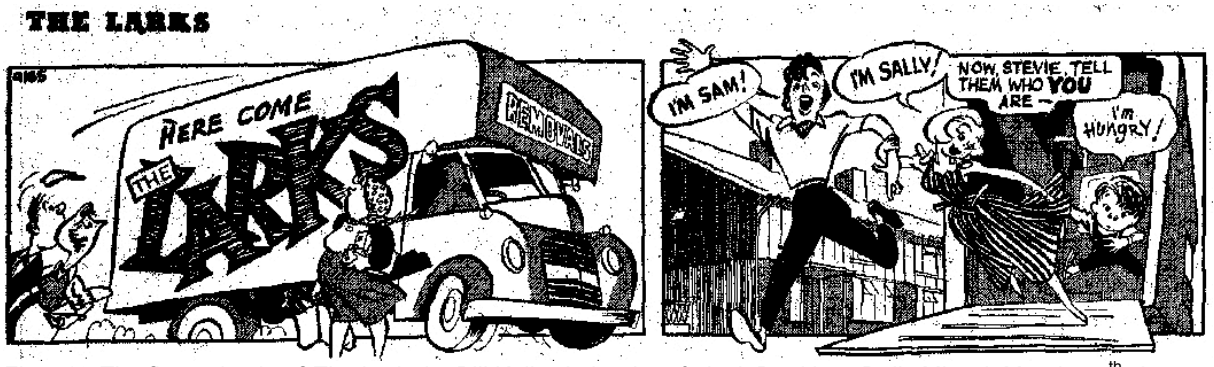


Fig 4.18 The first episode of *The Larks* by Bill Kelly, Arthur Lay & Jack Dunkley, 'Daily Mirror', Monday 5th August 1957

The final episode of *The Ruggles* showed John and Gladys Ruggles walking along a suburban street akin to John Betjeman's Metroland, turning into a gated and fenced garden and disappearing through the front door. John tells his wife they should 'leave the youngsters to sort their lives out while we quietly disappear into the background'.

The first episode of *The Larks* two days later depicts a speeding removals van rounding a corner, and a smartly-dressed family spilling out of the back door to the astonishment of passers-by. These are Ruggles' 'youngsters' come to cartoon life. *The Larks* was, like *The Perishers*, a concerted attempt to appeal to a younger adult readership. From this eye-catching start the strip swiftly settles into a similar formula in to the 'Daily Express's *Gambols* strip begun in 1950 by Dobs and Barry Appleby. Both strips are indebted to an historical American strip formula which Jerry Robinson has documented:

> *The Newlyweds*, begun in 1904, was the first family strip. It established a recurring theme in the comics: the crisis in the household of a young couple; the pretty and capable wife and the good-hearted but bumbling husband, a theme Chic Young's *Blondie* was to refine to near perfection.[39]

As Gravett notes, in 1963 '*The Larks* moved up from a working-class to a middle-class family, in line with their readers' aspirations.'[40] The strip tracked changes in social trends and fashion styles, but essentially the formula of shopping, accidentally inviting the boss to dinner and looking for a shopping parking space continued until 1985.

[39] Robinson, *The Comics*, p. 57.
[40] Gravett, *Great British Comics*, p. 31.

***Andy Capp* (14th April 1958-Present)**

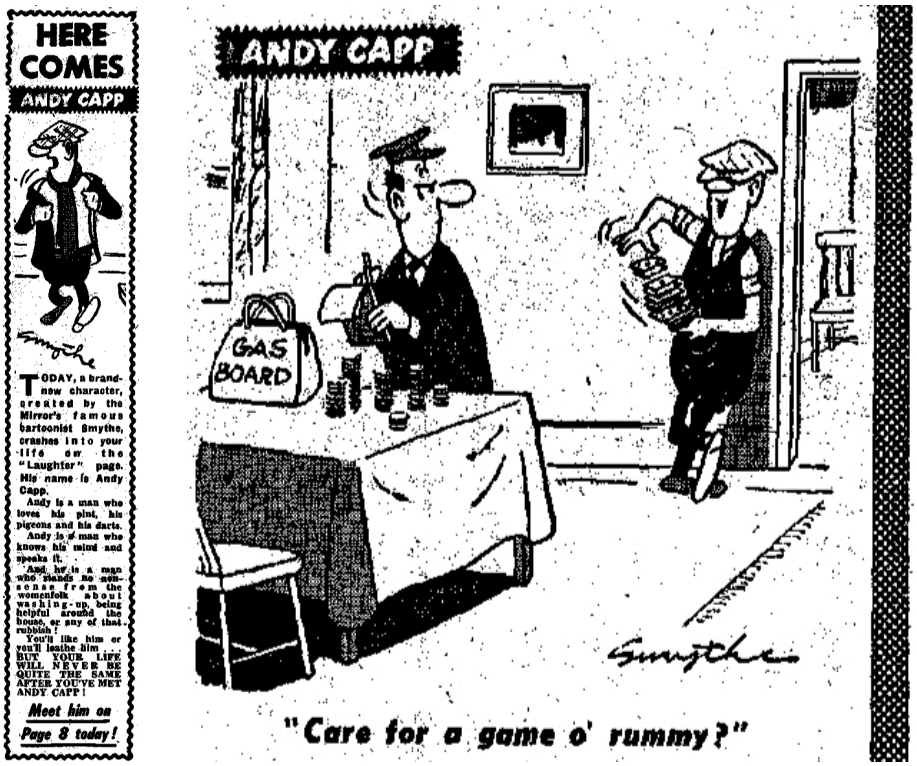


Fig 4.19 The first *Andy Capp* cover appearance and cartoon, 'Daily Mirror', 14th April 1958

The introductory blurb for the newspaper cover of *Andy Capp*'s first national appearance in 1958 reads:

> Andy is a man who loves his pint, his pigeons and his darts, Andy is a man who knows his mind and speaks it. And he is a man who stands no nonsense from the womenfolk about washing-up, being helpful around the house or any of that rubbish! You'll like him or you'll loathe him … BUT YOUR LIFE WILL NEVER BE QUITE THE SAME AFTER YOU'VE MET ANDY CAPP!

The first cartoon shows a uniformed utility company employee (his bag usefully inscribed with capital letters reading 'GAS BOARD') counting out the contents of the meter coin-box. Behind him stands a cocksure, big-nosed, flat-cap wearing lad expertly shuffling a pack of cards.

Andy Capp was by some distance more successful, better known and, especially for its creator Reg Smythe, far more financially rewarding than any other British newspaper cartoon strip. It has been syndicated all around the world; Andy is known as Tuffa Viktor in Sweden, Charlie Kappl in Austria and Willi Wacker in Germany,[41] and 'The Sun' created its own rip-off in lazy factory worker *Tommy Wack*.

[41] www.planetslade.com/andy-capp-reg-smythe01.html (Accessed 15 October 2010).

Andy Capp was conceived of and created in a day after Hartlepool cartoonist Smythe received an urgent telegram from 'Daily Mirror' cartoon editor Bill Herbert asking for 'A CARTOON TO APPEAL TO NORTHERN READERS.'[42] Of his own creation, self-taught cartoonist Smythe observed:

> I had to base Andy and Florrie on folk I knew well. Florrie, I based on my mother. The house where she and Andy live is number 37, the same number as the one we had when I was back home, while Andy looks like my dad, but isn't really based on my father's way of carrying on. Dad was inclined to be lazy, but he didn't have the poise and authority I gave my character. Andy is a sort of 'beefed up' version of Dad. Recognisable, but exaggerated.[43]

Once the strip settled into its square four-panel format, the shape and structure became spare and simple. The drawing is basic to the point of crude, the narrative scenarios following Andy's repetitive pattern of pubs, betting shops, football matches and horizontal television watching.

Andy Capp is still being printed every day in the 'Mirror', and is as close to the notion of a 'national treasure' as any other British cartoon character, possibly only matched by Scotland's *Oor Wullie* or comic book characters *Dennis the Menace* and *Billy Bunter*.

4.2 The Development of *The Perishers*

Although there is very little published material on the history of *The Perishers* newspaper strip, both writer Dodd and artist Collins provided background information in reprint collections. Dodd summarised the strip's gestation:

> *The Perishers* was the brainwave of Bill Herbert, then cartoon editor of the Daily Mirror. In order to turn his brainwave into something more substantial than an electric light bulb in a balloon above his head, he went into a huddle and a dark room with Dennis Collins and Ben Witham (a writer who moved on to write for *Useless Eustace*) and several months and blinding headaches later, *The Perishers* was launched into the Manchester edition of the Mirror, in February 1958. Not long after, I became involved in the strip by one of those remarkable acts of fate by which talent and perseverance are suddenly rewarded. Or to put it another way, the Cartoon Editor was a friend of mine.[44]

However, Collins described the origin and development of *The Perishers* as commencing with his idea for a strip called *Duffy and Drusilla*:

---

[42] Smythe, *The World of Andy Capp*, p. 19.
[43] Smythe, *The World of Andy Capp*, p. 19.
[44] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p 1974, ISBN 0 85939 031 4, Mirror Books Ltd, p. 2.

> Duffy was a boy who wore a miniature duffel coat-duffel coats were the 'in' thing that season, having spread north from the trendier purlieus of Chelsea where no painter or poet would be seen dead without one. Drusilla was Duffy's dog. She wore her own coat in contrast to Duffy's baby brother, Gregory, who sported an even smaller duffel wrapping. These cartoon characters (still unborn figments of the imagination) romped around my daydreams demanding to be let out. The accouchement was painless. One day they just leapt out on to the drawing board, followed by a supporting cast called Serena and Humph.
>
> I marshalled this instant gang into a dozen strip cartoons and headed for Fleet Street, hoping to sell them to a good home with a national newspaper. Worse things have happened to children. Fate took me to the offices of the 'Daily Mirror' where I showed my strips to the cartoon editor. I would like to report that he signed up *Duffy and Drusilla* on the spot. He didn't. Equally he didn't reject them out of hand. There was an interim period where they underwent remodelling on the drawing-board. I like to think they were the inspiration and prototypes for what finally emerged as *The Perishers*, with a story line supplied by Ben Witham, the strip's first writer.[45]

Therefore the idea for a strip about children originated with Collins, was renamed by Herbert, given to Gifford and Witham to script and then handed on to Dodd to write after an 18-month 'test-run' in the Northern edition of the 'Daily Mirror'.[46] Gifford elaborated:

> Maisie, Marlon, and Baby Grumpling were the original kids called *The Perishers*, a strip dreamed up by Bill Herbert, strip editor of the 'Daily Mirror', for the northern edition. It replaced *Hylda Baker's Diary*, a failure to adapt into strip form the popular radio comedienne. Artist Dennis Collins, then signing himself "Kol", was retained; writer Denis Gifford was replaced by Ben Witham. The strip started on February 10, 1958, a shadow of the 'Daily Sketch's popular *Peanuts*. Herbert brought in a new writer, advertising artist Maurice Dodd, and moved Witham to caption for Jack Greenall's panel, *Useless Eustace*. Dodd revived the absent Wellin'ton, the kid in a deerstalker who lives in a drainpipe, and fitted him out with Boot, a great big lovable lion of an Old English Sheepdog.[47]

Together with these versions of events, sales figures for the post-war newspapers also contribute to the story:

> The 'Daily Mirror's growth of circulation slowed down in the early 1950s, and began to fall after 1955. The paper also failed to maintain the substantial share of advertising it had won in the 1940s. Its management became increasingly aware that the tide of radicalism which had helped to sweep the paper to the top was receding and began to worry about whether the paper was moving out of step with the times … In the late 1950s the paper also pursued, for a mixture of motives, young and upwardly mobile readers.[48]

[45] Collins, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 238.
[46] None of the strips published in the Northern edition of the 'Daily Mirror' from early 1958 until October 1959 appear to have been archived anywhere, and copies of the original newspapers are virtually impossible to track down.
[47] Gifford, from Horn's *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, p. 608.
[48] James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, p. 94.

Due to this necessity to attract a new audience Herbert had been tasked by Mirror Chairman Hugh Cudlipp to develop new cartoon strips. Reg Smythe had been producing single cartoons for the 'Laughter' column when in 1957 he received a telegram from Herbert requesting a new northern character strip and *Andy Capp* was created to appeal to a young working-class readership. Conceivably Collins' arrival with the *Duffy & Drusilla* samples the same year also fitted Herbert's brief.

Maurice Dodd



Fig 4.20 Maurice Dodd, c.1980s

By 1958 Maurice Dodd was 36, married with a wife and family and working as a copywriter in the London offices of American advertising agency Young & Rubicam. Born in London in 1922, Dodd had grown up in Hackney. Leaving school at 15, he noted that he had worked at 'a number of unfascinating jobs until I was old enough to volunteer for the RAF'.[49] This period of employment included stints as 'Apprentice car-salesman; baker's roundsman; universal grinder operator; spray painter; shop assistant; postman; locomotive fireman; and caretaker,'[50] but he also offered the advice that 'any aspiring writers or artists reading this shouldn't get too worried as the above course is not a prerequisite'.[51] After war broke out he volunteered for the Royal Air Force in the hope of becoming an air-gunner. However, as he later noted, he 'so impressed the induction board by my inability to find Gibraltar on the map they unanimously voted me the ideal type to become an engine fitter - a job for which I had a natural inability'.[52]

[49] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 236.
[50] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus* 2, p. 238.
[51] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus* 2, p. 238. All the quotes from Dodd in this chapter are taken from texts written for *The Perishers* book collections, and read in his breezy, ironic style, equal parts haughty patrician, jaded cynic and playful satirist.
[52] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).

Dodd's engineering training led to his being mobilised with the RAF Servicing Commando. His unit were given commando training and their purpose was to follow behind the most forward troops, take over frontline airfields and establish new airstrips, service and maintain frontline aircraft. During Dodd's service he submitted and sold cartoons to *Seven* (the '*Magazine of people's writing')*. One significant circumstance of Dodd's wartime tenure was meeting fellow Servicing Commando Bill Herbert, later to become the Cartoon Editor of the 'Daily Mirror'.

At the war's end Dodd met and married Daphne Osborn, and in 1946 he received state funding to attend Hammersmith School of Arts & Crafts for four years. Consequently he sought freelance work and began producing illustrations for numerous and varied periodicals. Cartoon historian Mark Bryant provides the most comprehensively detailed itinerary of this post-war employment:

> Maurice worked as a freelance cartoonist for magazines such as *John Bull* and *Young Elizabethan* (for which he also wrote stories). He also drew political cartoons for *Union Jack*, *Catholic Worker* and *Direct Action*, and illustrated books such as Jim Phelan's *Wagon Wheels* (1951). Other work included cartoons and drawings for *Motorsport*, *Morning Advertiser*, *Sunday Mirror*, *Daily Record*, *MG Enthusiast* and *Dogs Today* (including stories), and illustrations for books such as *Jim Button and Luke the Engine-Driver* (1963) by Michael Ende. He was also a keen painter in oils, and later acrylics, and even had one of his pictures hung in the Royal Academy in 1953.[53]

The titles that Bryant lists describe the structure of a very particular publishing world; from the popular magazine compendium of illustrated short fiction of *John Bull* (named after the stout yeoman middle England national archetype created in 1712) to the *Young Elizabethan* (the periodical aimed at grammar school children which began publication after the Coronation in 1953), along the way incorporating the national flag (*Union Jack* was the 'in-house' newspaper for 'the British Fighting Forces'), pubs (*Morning Advertiser*), dogs and trains. This inventory of national emblems, wartime recollections, self-improving hobbies and leisure pursuits evokes the social, visual and cultural parameters of post-war Britain.

After a two-year spell of freelancing, in 1952 Dodd joined Halas & Batchelor's film studios and for 18 months worked as an animator or, as he later put it, 'I got my first full-time job as an artist, hindering the production of Britain's first full-length cartoon film, *Animal Farm*.'[54] The film was an adaptation of George Orwell's novel, and Dodd worked as a background artist painting the simplistic pastoral landscapes on which the individual cel paintings of the pigs and other

[53] Bryant, 'Maurice Dodd Obituary', *The Independent*, 3rd January 2006.
[54] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).

characters would be overlaid. Son Mike notes this experience was an influence on what would later become a principal and significant component of the visual language of *The Perishers*:

> One of the things about the strip is he does a lot of continuous backgrounds, a bit like a cartoon, almost like a frozen animation because the characters advance across the scene. And I think some of that comes from when he was working on the backgrounds on *Animal Farm*, as you paint across and move the artwork layer upon layer in front of the camera.[55]

After production on *Animal Farm* finished Dodd went on TA annual manoeuvres and suffered an accident during a parachute jump. Awarded two weeks' army sick pay gave him the opportunity to pursue other employment, and he secured work as a visualiser in the London-based offices of worldwide advertising agency Young & Rubicam. However, frustrated by the technical and vocational limitations of the work, as he later noted:

> I found it difficult to overcome the urge to write, which seemed to annoy some people who found it difficult to accept the possibility that an artist could write, or a writer could draw, or a one man band could play a number of instruments at one and the same time. So much did my literary attempts annoy one man that he arrived at my desk one morning and threw down a form to enter a competition to write an ad for *Time* magazine. "You think you can write, well let's see how asterisk clever you are by having a go at this", was the gist of his cheery greeting. And now the plot thickens to the consistency of Polyfilla. I surprised myself and several bystanders by winning the competition.[56]

As Mike recalls, 'the prize was a week in Istanbul and he had to produce some sort of report and he did all these pen and ink drawings of Istanbul'.[57] Dodd's competition success also came to the attention of ex-Army colleague Bill Herbert who had a proposition for him:

> The newly-born *Perishers* strip was not thriving. It was felt that a second opinion would be helpful, and I was asked to carry out some repairs and renovations. Immediately, I went berserk with the heady power of it all and had most of the characters taken out and shot, filling the gaps with sycophantic yes-men whose vote I knew I could count on if the need ever arose.[58]

Dodd's attitude to his characters is ironically distanced. Mike affirms his father's enjoyment at the editorial freedom to shape Wellington and make the strip his own:

> He invented him. There were a number of characters and as he said he had them shot and replaced them with his own placemen. Effectively he was given a strip and given carte blanche so he took it and peopled it with people he wanted it to be full of … The job then was to do the script, do the jokes as a sort of cross between a daily joke and a soap opera, a situation comedy. So he had to do the joke and he had to do

[55] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.
[56] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).
[57] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.
[58] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).

> rough drawings and he'd do the roughs with all the jokes in and he'd post them off to Bill or he'd take them into the 'Mirror' office occasionally and then Bill would OK them and then pass them on to Dennis Collins who lived up in Liverpool.[59]

Although Dodd's acknowledgement of specific comics inspiration for *The Perishers* is rare, Bryant recorded that 'Dodd cited his influences as being *Just Jake* by the 'Daily Mirror's Bernard Graddon and the American comic strips *Li'l Abner*, *Popeye* and *Pogo*'.[60] While *Just Jake* was discussed within the context of other 'Daily Mirror' strips, each of these three American comic strips is worthy of brief examination.

Li'l Abner was created by Al Capp, a notoriously dyspeptic character in American comics history, a one-legged libertarian Republican who wished for and subsequently revelled in the misfortune and death of industry rivals and ex-colleagues. Originally advertised as 'a hilarious and human new comic strip, the story of a real hill-billy boy'[61], Ron Goulart has observed that Capp was 'utilizing a classic theme, one that had been used for countless centuries – that of the country bumpkin in the big city.'[62] *Li'l Abner* has been considered significant for its comic strip representation of the American South.

Popeye was created by cartoonist Elzie Crisler (known as E C) Segar and first appeared as a character in a newspaper strip called *Thimble Theatre* in 1929. The strip was eventually renamed *Popeye* and was published in Britain by the 'Daily Mirror' from 1938, possibly where Dodd encountered it. Although Segar died four months after the strip first appeared in the 'Mirror' his assistants and other artists have continued producing the strip up to the present day. Most famous for its lead character's love of spinach, the strip also had a large supporting cast of strange characters, including Swee'pea, who in his initial incarnation as mute anarchic toddler bears a distinct similarity to *The Perishers*' Baby Grumpling.

Pogo was written and drawn by Walt Kelly who gained an animation apprenticeship with Disney Studios in California and worked on *Snow White*, *Fantasia* and *Pinocchio*. *Pogo* began in 1942 and was, according to Goulart,

> A sort of fuzzy *Candide* who resided in a southern swamp where all the creatures great and small could talk. Some of them even wore clothes. Even in the funny books, supposedly aimed at children, Kelly indulged his fondness for slapstick and burlesque, puns, plays on words, satire, and rowdy behavior. He carried most of the major swampland characters from the comic book – Albert the Alligator, Churchy La Femme, Howland Owl – into the newspaper strip. And he became increasingly fond of using Pogo as an

[59] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.
[60] Bryant , 'Maurice Dodd Obituary', *The Independent*, 3rd January 2006.
[61] Goulart *The Funnies*, p. 132.
[62] Goulart *The Funnies*, p. 133.

> instrument of political satire. In the decades that followed, this made Kelly the most outspoken cartoonist working in the funny papers.'[63]

While Goulart's description of the elements of *Pogo* as comprising 'slapstick and burlesque, puns, plays on words, satire, and rowdy behavior' could describe many newspaper strips in part, the entire combination apply to *The Perishers*. Indeed, they also apply to *Li'l Abner* and *Popeye*, and it is possibly this screwball, absurdist and linguistic sensibility that Dodd responded to. Other formal elements of *Pogo* are also pertinent; Jerry Robinson notes that Kelly's 'calligraphy is an essential part of the art … characters have lettering styles of their own that suggest each personality and tone of voice,'[64] a quality that carries over to *The Perishers*' characters Baby Grumpling and Adolf Kilroy the tortoise.

All three strips share a strong sense of the absurd, an extensive and dense use of wordplay and idiolect, an anti-establishment sensibility and a large cast of oddly-named eccentric characters in keeping with the content of *The Perishers*.

Mike Dodd also notes that the domestic context and surrounding of family life fed into the narrative of *The Perishers*. His father worked on *The Perishers* at home on weekends and Mike said 'it was perfectly normal to have a lunatic cartoonist sitting in the shed shrieking at his own jokes.'[65] Dodd drove a beach buggy, the children owned a Spacehopper, and the idea for the strip's annual crabs in the rockpool sequence emerged from family seaside holidays. The Dodd family's ownership of an Old English sheepdog especially was a fund of material for jokes based around *The Perishers*' central relationship between Wellington and Old Boot:

> My father got an awful lot of ideas from that dog, because what he'd do is he'd try and put himself in the dog's place and he'd think about what was going on. An awful lot of the jokes, especially between Wellington and Boot, are actually my father's thoughts really. They're actually his own thought processes going on there.[66]

These 'thought processes' and how they informed the strip will be fully discussed in Chapter Five. Dodd was the only writer on *The Perishers*, retiring from advertising work in 1979 and writing and sometimes drawing the strip until he died on New Year's Eve 2006.

[63] Goulart, *The Funnies*, p. 186.
[64] Robinson, *The Comics*, p. 172.
[65] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.
[66] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.

Dennis Collins

Dennis Collins was ten years older than Dodd and already a professional illustrator and graphic artist by the time he turned to newspaper strip work at the age of 45. Born in Sutton Coldfield in Warwickshire on 17th May 1912, Collins studied graphic design at Birmingham School of Art and for some years after worked as a commercial artist in the Wirral.



Fig 4.21 Dennis Collins, c.1974

When war began Collins declared himself a conscientious objector, so instead of active service he was posted to Briggens House in Roydon, Essex. This country estate had been requisitioned as the site of Station XIV, the branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) specialising in the production of forged documents to aid counter-intelligence in the war effort. As his daughter Dr Judy Collins notes,

> He joined the army but was a pacifist, so they put him on map-making, which was a passion of his. He was so good at this that he was taken up by SOE, and he worked as a forger at Station XIV throughout the war. His capacity for detail was breathtaking- he wrote the words of the Lords Prayer with a one-hair brush onto a small silver coin – I forget the denomination.[67]

In fact the text is written on a small square of paper measuring three sixteenths by one quarter of an inch, or 2mm x 6.4mm. Collins clearly possessed the valuable technical expertise and precision necessary for forgery.

[67] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012.

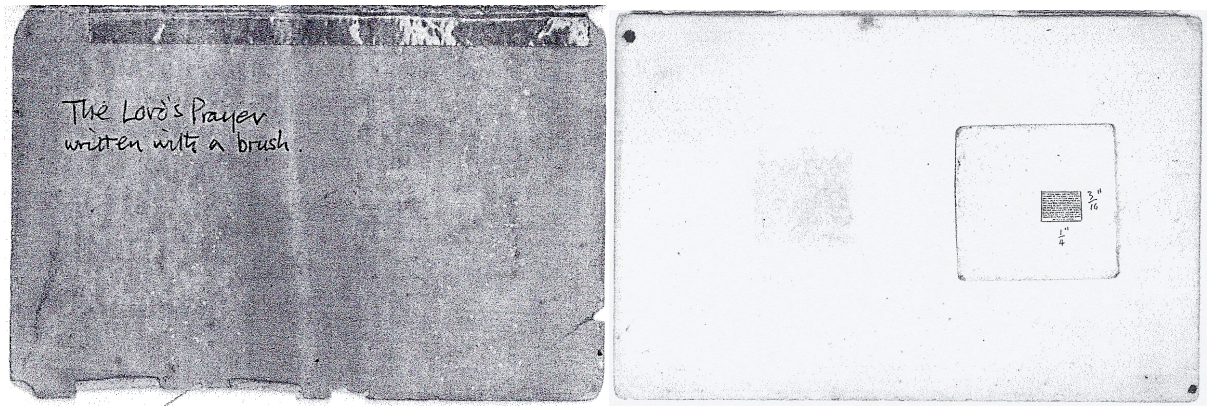


Fig 4.22 Dennis Collins, 'The Lord's Prayer written with a brush', c.1940

That artwork, together with other Briggens memorabilia, was donated by Dr Collins to the Imperial War Museum. Amongst the archive box are designs for Christmas cards, regimental dinners and menus depicting local villages and sites. The bulk of the box is comprised of copies of 15 editions of 'Snoop' the Briggens Wall Magazine. These are typical examples of the commonplace regiment, school or company publications produced 'in-house' by enlistees, students or employees.

The most technically accomplished drawing (listed in the archive as 'a cartoon of the staff of Briggens (August 1945)') is titled *The Last Round-Up*. Evidently conceived as a farewell gift to the men of Briggens, it is a group portrait of about fifty men conversing socially, often with particular character traits, verbal tics or leisure interests gently satirised.

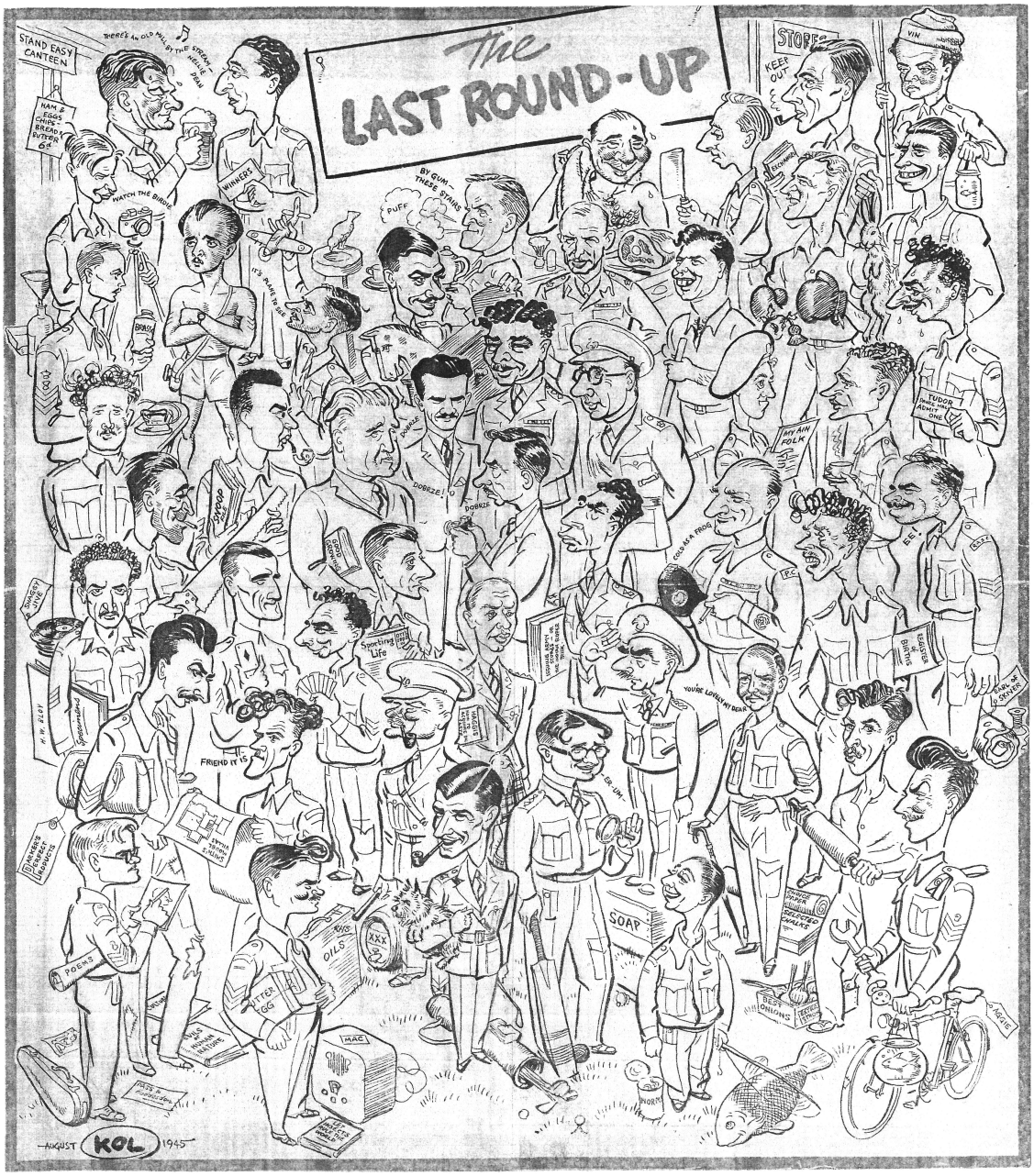


Fig 4.23 Dennis Collins, *The Last Round-Up*, August 1945

A group of Polish soldiers exchange the word 'dobrze', meaning either 'well', 'alright' or 'OK'.[68] Other men make comments locating them regionally and by social class such as 'By Gum - these stairs' and 'You're lovely, my dear'. A shirtless man, straight from the bath, towels his neck, his heat-flushed face grinning. A small, smiling angler stands over a fat grinning fish with a can marked 'worms' at his feet. A smoking, smirking, unshaven chap tests the tensility of a saw. The mutual warmth and camaraderie of the group is tangible. There is something of the quality of David Low and H M Bateman's cartoons, Reg Wootton's strip *Sporting Sam* and John Tenniel's *Alice* illustrations. The robust physicality of line, the strong shape and texture of such

[68] http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/dobrze (Accessed 15 October 2016).

details as a small dog's fur, the fish's scales and the cans and bottles prefigure the level of detail in *The Perishers* cartoons. Collins has drawn himself at the bottom left of the picture, pencil and pad in hand and intently sketching the scene itself, slightly set apart from and outside the group conviviality, a rolled tube of paper marked 'POEMS' tucked under his right arm.



Fig 4.24 Dennis Collins' self-portrait from *The Last Round-Up*, August 1945

After the war ended Collins returned to freelance illustration work for Liverpool-based clients such as Littlewoods Brochures and Bees Seeds. He obtained his first newspaper strip work for the Northern edition of the 'Daily Mirror' drawing a comic strip called *Hylda Baker's Diary*, which was written by Denis Gifford and featured the titular music-hall entertainer. One surviving example of the strip is reprinted in one of Gifford's books.[69]

[69] Gifford, *Stap Me - The History of the British Newspaper Comic Strip*, p. 17.



Fig 4.25 *Hylda Baker's Diary*, Denis Gifford & Dennis Collins, 'Daily Mirror' (Northern edition), c. 1957

The four-panel strip is in a square format similar to early *Andy Capp* strips. The humorous wordplay is as broad and lewd as to be expected from its music-hall subject. In the first panel Baker's friend and mute comic foil 'Big Cynthia' (as played by a man in drag) has a conch shell to 'her' ear listening to the sea. The panel layout is stylistically unusual as the panel borders are lower than the speech balloons, emphasising Cynthia's comic height. Baker requests the shell, listens and announces to her friend she can hear 'The wild rush of the waves - the soft sweet sigh of the wind, like you after hot-pot and pickled cabbage'. The allusion to flatulence is par for the course and Cynthia attempts to alert Hylda by pointing to the incoming wave that, in the final panel, crashes over the breakwater and soaks the two women. A young boy's cartoon smiling face appears in the bottom right-hand corner to mimic the amused viewer's reaction to the visual slapstick. Dr Collins remembers the short-lived comics strip, meeting its real-life protagonist and witnessing her catchphrase first-hand:

> I don't know how they got the relationship, because we went to Blackpool and saw her. And she kept saying 'She knows, you know!'. And she was thrilled, but I don't quite know how it came about. But that preceded everything. That was my first knowledge of him doing things. And that ran a short time, I think. I would have thought a year or two at the most.[70]

[70] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012

After *Hylda Baker's Diary* Dennis began to develop an original strip called *Duffy and Drusilla* which Dr Collins recalls:

> My mother said the name *Duffy and Drusilla* would never catch on. He did two proper, cartoon-size samples of them, and I thought they were lovely because they were older than me. They were just teenager-y and rather sort of stylish. She had a lot of hair and Duffy, the boy, had the duffel coat.[71]

The description of the long-lost strips as depicting 'teenager'y' characters suggests something closer to a 'he-and-she' young couple's strip. With Herbert's editorial input Collins' proposal became *The Perishers* and began being published in the 'Daily Mirror' on 10th February 1958.

Collins illustrated *The Perishers* until 1987 when he retired to look after his ailing wife Gwen, having drawn the strip for 28 years.

Summary

In 1958 *The Perishers* became the latest in a long line of comic strips in the 'Daily Mirror' which since 1935 had taken direct inspiration from successful American sources, principally from 'New York Daily News' strips. Once these properties had been transatlantically re-sited, with the passing of time they often acquired particularly British characteristics, themes and visual styles.

[71] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012.

Chapter Five: 'Eyeballs In The Sky' – The Development of *The Perishers* (1958-1987)

> So the days and the weeks succeed one another, often dull and grey, but relieved by all kinds of excitements. There is a rhythm, but it is the rhythm of a brick-world, to which those of the seasons or of the great religious festivals are only incidental.[1]

This chapter will examine the development of *The Perishers* for the duration of the Maurice Dodd and Dennis Collins partnership until Collins' retirement in 1987. Subsequently Dodd continued writing and mostly drawing the strip with the contribution of cartoonists Brian Platt and Bill Mevin. However, the two principal creators' 28-year collaboration responded to changes in post-war Britain to the extent that the last strips from 1987 detail a cultural, social and physical landscape unrecognisable from the earliest years.

For my PhD study I decided to focus on *The Perishers* as I had read and collected it in adolescence, considered it an intelligently written and drawn artwork and an overlooked cultural property. *The Perishers* was considered in Chapter One as one reading source among many absorbed through childhood in order to provide a personal, nostalgic and emotional framework of context and influence. This chapter will examine the strip specifically as a model of practice and one element of the formal and conceptual underpinning for my artwork.

During the publication of *The Perishers* the 'Daily Mirror' achieved a daily readership of 14 million. For such a long-running nationally distributed newspaper strip it seemed unusual that so little historical material was extant. In relative demographic terms an equivalent American readership would be around 60 million, a hugely successful cultural property which would have inevitably drawn some scrutiny and consideration. I will analyse *The Perishers* from a number of critical perspectives. I will consider the visual and verbal languages within the strip and how they developed in relation to pop-cultural and socio-political shifts, either in the representations of the characters, the situations or the image-making. I will also examine the formal development of the strip, the use of panel borders, visual techniques, slang and dialogue.

Given the persistent observation that *The Perishers* emerged as a British version of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*, it is useful to consider the relative origins of both strips. *Peanuts* evolved out of a single gag format that Schulz had been refining called *Li'l Folks* which was already being published in his weekly local paper, whereas *The Perishers* was developed as a competitor by the 'Daily Mirror' because first the 'Daily Sketch' and then the 'Daily Mail' owned the British

[1] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 53.

rights of publication to *Peanuts*. With some editorial direction, Collins was partnered with Denis Gifford and the strip began publication in February 1958.

Peanuts and *The Perishers* shared teething troubles in establishing a central cast and format. *Peanuts* was first published in October 1950, and in its nascent stage its protagonists bore little resemblance to their ultimate iconic representations. Charlie Brown did not own his trademark zigzag sweatshirt, Snoopy was a mute puppy waking on all fours and Lucy Van Pelt was a round-eyed baby. It took until 1956 for the strip's elements to coalesce to become recognisably *Peanuts*.

The Perishers began to cohere when Dodd started writing it when, as previously noted, he 'went berserk with the heady power of it all and had most of the old characters taken out and shot, filling the vacancies with sycophantic creatures on whose aid I knew I could count if ever the need arose'.[2] This flippancy when describing the existence of one's fictional creations speaks volumes about the divergent methods of the writers. Crucially, the military analogy that Dodd favours also gives a clue to the origins of each strip. Both Dodd and Schulz served in World War II, and their reflections on the experience and its impact on their creations provides a key insight to their different mentalities. Schulz is recorded as admitting:

> The three years I spent in the army in World War II taught me all I needed to know about loneliness, and my sympathy for the loneliness that all of us experience has dropped heavily upon poor Charlie Brown. From my army years I know what it is like to spend days, evenings, and weekends by myself and also know how uncomfortable anxiety can be. I worry about almost all there is in life to worry about, and because I worry, Charlie Brown has to worry.[3]

Schulz's incipient melancholia does not appear to have been mirrored in Dodd's military experience, though son Mike acknowledged this was guarded and latterly had an emotional impact:

> My father never talked about it an awful lot except that I know it made a very deep impression on him. I think when they weren't being shot at and bombed and having the very life scared out of them they were actually having quite a good time. He told us some funny stories about things. There was a very strong bond between him and all the blokes that were in the unit as well.[4]

Peanuts supplied Schulz with a context to make sense of his wartime experiences, and this process enabled the documentation of the post-war American suburban psychology. In

[2] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).
[3] Schulz, *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration*, p. 9.
[4] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.

contrast, Dodd's creative approach to *The Perishers* was to use it as a vehicle to vent mild spleen at cultural and political targets through the comic perspective of children, while for Collins the strip was a blank canvas upon which to explore the various possibilities of picture-making.

These disparate approaches to their creations is central to the two strips' relative world-views. The context for Schulz's post-war environment was America's cultural isolationism of the 1950s, the self-questioning 1960s, the 'Me' Decade and beyond. As Umberto Eco wrote regarding the *Peanuts* characters,

> The poetry of these children arises from the fact that we find in them all the problems, all the sufferings of the adults, who remain offstage. These children affect us because in a certain sense they are monsters: they are the monstrous infantile reductions of all the neuroses of a modern citizen of industrial civilization.[5]

While *Peanuts* reflected the 'neuroses' of a post-war America, *The Perishers* equally distilled the essence of Dodd's experiences of British bureaucracy, class structures and social hierarchy. Whereas Charlie Brown has a family, apparently doting parents and a stable suburban home life, Wellington is orphaned, self-reliant and lives in a concrete pipe. Brown is presented as a loser, doomed to failure because, as Eco has it, 'he seeks salvation through the routine formulas suggested to him by the society in which he lives.'[6] However, Wellington is forced by circumstance to function outside of society. His crises are entirely external, societal and acculturated. He is the 'little man' railing against life's vicissitudes and inequities.

Throughout the first half of its history *The Perishers* documented changes in domestic social and cultural history through its landscapes, characters' fashions and dialogue. The backgrounds pictured post-war urban bombsites, terraced streets and weed-strewn canals and the construction of new flyovers and high-rise tower blocks. Over time urban development projects like adventure playgrounds are built while in the background flyovers and tower blocks rise up around the childrens' social spaces. The characters wore beatnik duffle coats and winklepicker shoes, rode go-karts and spacehoppers and discussed The Beatles, Harold Wilson, television, social unrest and the oil crises. Similarly, the language developed into a dense and complex verbal lexicon of catchphrases, slang, rhetoric and punning specific to the strip. This combination of wordplay, social comment and the post-war urban and pastoral locations made it a specifically located property relative to other strips like *Andy Capp* and *Fred Bassett*. Although these both drew on recognisable working and middle-class contexts, their

[5] Eco, Introduction to the first Italian *Peanuts* collection *Arriva Charlie Brown*!, 1963.
[6] Eco, Introduction to the first Italian *Peanuts* collection *Arriva Charlie Brown*!, 1963.

lack of verbal complexity and visual detail made them more accessible and translatable to foreign markets and audiences.

The Four Stage Method

Film critic Thomas Schatz has defined a 'four-stage' method for examining a cultural form or genre as follows:

> A form passes through an experimental stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a classic stage, in which the conventions reach their "equilibrium" and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of refinement, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a baroque (or "mannerist" or "self-reflexive" stage), when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they are the "substance" or "content" of the work.[7]

Although Schatz' proposal for the four-stages of a form was designed to describe the trajectory of a cinematic genre such as 'the musical' or 'screwball comedy', Peter Coogan has subsequently applied it to the development of the superhero comic through its Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages.[8] It can also be applied to the development of newspaper comic strips through the twentieth century. For example, the 'Experimental Stage' of newspaper comics history would include works such as Britain's *Ally Sloper*[9] and America's *The Yellow Kid*. The conventions that were 'isolated and established' in this period were the division of a single picture into two or more images that created a sequence, and the formalising of dialogue and text into speech balloons and captions.

The 'Classic Stage' in America occurred broadly from 1910-1940 where the stylistic elements of the newspaper comic strip were tested, developed and consolidated. The writers and artists and their creations that comprise the canon of strips that form this 'Golden Age' include Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo In Slumberland*, Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Sidney Smith's *The Gumps*, George McManus' *Bringing Up Father*, Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*, Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* and Chic Young's *Blondie & Dagwood*. They are respectively concerned with childhood and coming-of-age, dreaming and the unconscious, the everyday and lived experience, shamanism and surrealism, the family as soap-opera, crime and corruption and the relationship between rural and urban communities. Unconcerned with global issues, they are uniquely American in outlook, politics and verbal and visual vernacular. The British equivalents would be

[7] Schatz, quoted in Coogan, *A Comic Studies Reader*, p. 91.
[8] Coogan, *A Comic Studies Reader*, p. 91. In superhero comics the 'Golden Age' runs from the 1930s to the 1950s, the 'Silver Age' for the 1960s, the 'Bronze Age' from the late 1960s through to the mid 1980s, and the 'Iron Age' from then on.
[9] Ally Sloper, a prototypical working-class drunken layabout, appeared in *Judy* Magazine from 1867. See Sabin, *Ally Sloper: The First Comics Superstar*, http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/graphicnovel/rogersabin.htm (Accessed: 17 October 2016).

Mary Tourtel's *Rupert*, Norman Pett's *Jane*, Bertram Lamb's *Pip, Squeak and Wilfred*, Bernard Graddon's *Just Jake* and Bill Connor & Steve Dowling's *Belinda* and *The Ruggles*.

The American 'Age of Refinement' from the 1940s through to the late 1960s encompasses more radical visual and narrative approaches that absorbed influences from other media such as TV, cinema and literature. These include Schulz's *Peanuts*, Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, Mort Walker and Jerry Dumas' *Sam's Strip*, Leonard Starr's *On Stage* and Milton Caniff's *Steve Canyon*. All of these developed styles and concerns from the previous era while incorporating newer socio-political narratives. For example, Walt Kelly's *Pogo* took inspiration from the influence of Disney 'funny animal' comics and the surrealism of *Krazy Kat* and added a linguistic complexity and satire of pork-barrel politics and nascent ecological concerns, while Leonard Starr's *On Stage* combined an understanding of genre illustration and advertising art in a strip that mixed the episodic sensibility of TV soap opera with the glamour of 1960s Broadway. The British equivalents from this stage would be *The Perishers*, Reg Smythe's *Andy Capp* and other 'Daily Mirror' strips as well as Alex Graham's *Fred Bassett*, Wally Fawkes' *Flook*, David Wright's *Carol Day*, and Steve Dowling's *Garth*. Similarly to the American strips, this stage would reflect social, cultural and political shifts in society, from representations of the post-war working class, suburban middle England and social and political satire.

The 'Baroque Stage' lasts from the early 1970s through to the end of the century. In the USA this period would see a proliferation of different publications, audiences and demographics; not only would strips appear in traditional newspapers but also in new alternative and underground publications like the 'Chicago Reader', the 'New York Free Press' and 'National Lampoon'. As well as a comics page containing *Dick Tracy*, *Peanuts* and *Little Orphan Annie*, it could also contain properties licenced from film and TV such as *Spider-man*, *Star Wars* or *The Muppets*. However, notable developments within the form are increasingly rare and would include Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*, Berke Breathed's *Bloom County* and Bill Waterson's *Calvin & Hobbes*. Notable British newspaper strips from this period would be Charles Peattie & Russell Taylor's yuppie satire *Alex* in 'The Independent', Steve Bell's political satires *Maggie's Farm* and *If…*, and permissive-era erotic strips such as 'The Guardian's *Varoomshka* and 'The Sun's *George & Lynne* and *Axa*.

The Four Stages of *The Perishers*

In the history of *The Perishers*, Schatz's four-stage method can also usefully subdivide the 28-year Dodd/Collins partnership into a series of developmental points. The 'Experimental Stage' begins with its inception in February 1958 in the 'Daily Mirror' Northern edition and continues

through to when the strip adopted a ‘solus’ position in the newspaper in July 1962 (a larger format isolated on a page rather than as part of a tier of strips). At this stage the characters were undefined and a variety of styles, ideas and techniques were tested and either established or disregarded.

The move to the solus format began the refinement of the characteristic aspects of the strip that mark the ‘Classic Stage.’ The exaggerated and energetic cartoon style of the first two years is gradually replaced by a slower-paced, more linguistically-based humour; kineticism gives way to stasis. The new physical shape of the strip is a key aspect of this development; the form allows for a similar amount of image space while increasing the available room for dialogue. The strips consequently become verbally richer. Whereas in the early years of the strip the characters speak as children in staccato exposition, now their exchanges are becoming more nuanced, incorporating punning, wordplay, slang and argot. The viewer’s eye is often fixed as the characters play out the narratives in the way of a theatre or music hall. Backgrounds become more sophisticated as the generic terrace roofs and factory chimneys on the horizon are replaced by detailed street scenes, architectural styles and a more realistically depicted urban landscape.

The ‘Age of Refinement’ begins in mid-1969 and lasts until mid-1975. Virtually all of the narrative tropes, themes, and characters are now in place. As the strip enters the 1970s a consistent yearly shape emerges. Storylines are extended and repeated, the scale of the characters becomes standardised and an essential formula dominates, that of the comedic shape of setup, structure, development and fulfillment.

The ‘Baroque Stage’ runs from late-1975 until Dennis Collins leaves the strip in 1987 and is the period when no new characters are introduced and the strip has attained a fixed and formulaic structure. Old jokes are recycled, no significant landscape scenes or characters are added, and the compositions and image-making become increasingly repetitious and simplified.

The following overview will examine principal and secondary characters, chart the development of narrative tropes and annual events and cycles, and discuss the strip’s relationship to popular culture, folklore, politics and other media. Many of these strips have never been reprinted since their original publication date and if this is the case they are marked ‘(Uncollected).’

4.1 The 'Experimental Stage' (1958-mid 1962)

The first *Perishers* strip to be published in the national 'Daily Mirror' was on Monday 19th October 1959. The strip had been prominently trailed on the front page of the previous Saturday's edition.



Daily Mirror

SAT OCT. 17 1959

No. 17,368

... that thunder of tiny feet!

IT'S THE PERISHERS!

☆ Get a good night's sleep on Sunday, folks!

On Monday the Mirror unleashes the off-beatest, whackiest, most unforgettable mob of strip cartoon kids ever....

ALL THE MEN POSTED, SERGEANT?

YESSIR! AND LUMME!—ONLY JUST IN TIME!

THE PERISHERS!

—STARTING ON MONDAY.

TODAY—PATTI FINDS HER SISTER

SHE'S TAKING HER CLOTHES OFF! SOSH! IF ONLY AUNT NELLIE COULD SEE HER NOW!

See Page 5

Order your Mirror NOW—for next week's Surprises and Prizes

INGRID (AND FAMILY) IN PLANE DRAMA

—as Rossellini tries to get his son back

From LAURENCE WILKINSON
Rome, Friday

A TEARFUL Ingrid Bergman protectively clasped her ten-year-old son Robertino at Rome airport tonight after a dramatic last-minute bid by her former husband, Roberto Rossellini, to KEEP the boy.

Ingrid then boarded a plane for Paris with Robertino and her seven-year-old twin daughters, Isabella (left) and Isotta—pictured with her just before the plane left.

Miss Bergman and the children arrived at the airport an hour before take-off time.

He Protested

Minutes later a telegram from Rossellini—who was ordered on Tuesday to return the children to their mother—reached Rome police.

Rossellini was given holiday custody of the children until October 8. Tuesday's court decision turned down his plea for an extension.

He protested that Robertino should NOT have been issued with a passport because his birth certificate does not mention his mother's name.

And he added "In law Robertino cannot be entrusted to a woman who is not established as the mother." [Robertino was born in a Rome clinic while Miss Bergman was still married to Dr. Peter Lindstrom, a Hollywood physician. He was registered as "son of Roberto Rossellini, mother unknown."]

Rome's Prefect of Police telephoned the airport and ordered that the plane should remain grounded.

Passengers—including British tourists—were told: "Your departure has been delayed for reasons that are NOT of a technical nature."

The police chief then contacted the judge who ruled on the Bergman-Rossellini dispute and asked if Robertino should be taken off the plane.

The judge told him: "LET THE MOTHER TAKE ALL THREE CHILDREN."

With tears streaming down her face, Ingrid shepherded the children across the tarmac.

And the airliner took off—three minutes late.

● In Paris last night Ingrid and the children were met at the airport by her husband, Swedish impresario Lars Schmidt.

'Let the boy go' —judge

Advertiser's Announcement

NOW HAVE SOME CADBURYS

– you deserve it!

Fig 5.1 'Daily Mirror' (cover), Saturday 17th October 1959

The cover 'teaser' (fig 4.1) depicts an angry-looking and as-yet unnamed Wellington, Marlon and Maisie at the front of a sketched army of marching children above the caption '… that thunder of tiny feet!'. These earliest incarnations of *The Perishers* characters define the clothing that will remain virtually unchanged for their first four years. Marlon is dressed in a white shirt with overlong polka dot tie and black waistcoat, grey trousers and black brothel creepers, Maisie wears a straw hat and summer frock, and Wellington sports a checked tweed hat, raincoat and gumboots.



Fig 5.2 'Daily Mirror' (cover details), Saturday 17th October 1959

The text beneath the drawing promises 'the off-beatest, whackiest, most unforgettable mob of strip cartoon kids ever….'. Beneath this a square panel (Fig 5.2) shows two policemen discussing the imminent arrival of the 'unforgettable mob'. A hook-nosed Inspector asks a flat-nosed subordinate "All the men posted, Sergeant?" with the response "Yessir! And lumme! – Only just in time!". In the background stands a policeman 'at ease' against a brick wall and another waiting half-hidden around the corner. The visual inference is that the neighbourhood is heavily policed in anticipation of the arrival of, as the text below the panel states, 'THE PERISHERS! – STARTING ON MONDAY.' The front cover announcements indicate the continued editorial emphasis on the cartoon content of the 'Mirror'.



Fig 5.3 'Daily Mirror' (cartoon page), Saturday 17th October 1959

The comics page the day before the first *Perishers* strip was published (Fig 5.3) comprised six strips which were, running down from the top of the page, *Buck Ryan*, *The Larks*, *Belinda*, *The Flutters*, *Garth* and *Romeo Brown*.

The edition of the 'Daily Mirror' on Monday October 19th 1959 also trumpeted the arrival of the new strip with a text box on the front cover reading:

'CALLING EVERYBODY
Today the Mirror releases THE PERISHERS
No use trying to stop 'em: here they are. Those off-beat, whacky, lovable (they think !) kids.
Here's Marlon, the crepe-sole smasher (he hopes !).
Here's Maisie … The gal with a whim of iron (she thinks !)
TURN TO PAGE 19 … AND DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU !'



Fig 5.4 'Daily Mirror' (cover detail), Monday 19th October 1959

Drawings of Marlon and Maisie flank the text, Marlon arms folded and eyes closed with a haughty, aloof expression while Maisie faces him, hands on hips and apparently mid-harangue.

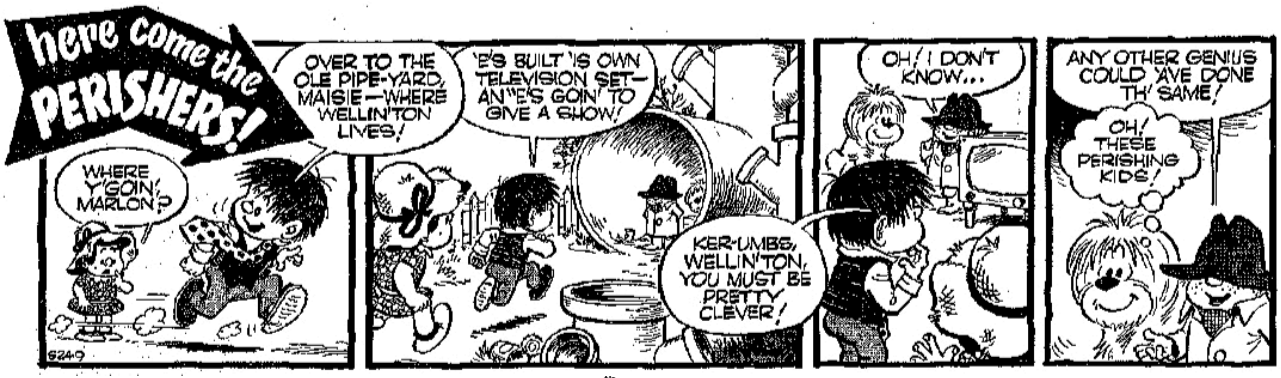


Fig 5.5 *The Perishers* (S249), 'Daily Mirror', Monday 19th October 1959 (Uncollected)

The first *Perishers* appearance is a four-panel strip that introduces all the main characters. A crooked black arrow containing the white text 'here come the PERISHERS!' masks the space where the strip title would ordinarily be sited, and the arrow begins pointing upwards as if ascending and then halfway along bends downwards as if broken in the middle. This shape already suggests a comedically broken bent-ness, the visual equivalent of the 'doing!' twanged-ruler sound effect or 'wah-wah-wah' trombone that accompanied gaffes on the musical soundtrack to a 'Laurel & Hardy' film.

In the first panel Maisie stands still as Marlon runs past her, the cartoon convention of horizontal direction lines known as 'zip ribbons' signifying rapid motion and trailing puffy clouds indicating the kicking up of dust in his wake. Maisie calls out 'Where y'goin', Marlon?' and Marlon, his polka dot tie trailing over his shoulder, calls back to her 'Over to the pipe-yard,

Maisie – where Wellin'ton lives!' The downward point of the crooked black arrow directs the reader's gaze through Marlon's first dialogue balloon and on towards the second panel. In a speech balloon positioned within this second panel Marlon exclaims ''E's built 'is own television set – an' 'e's goin' to give a show!.' The characters' glottal stops locate the characters as lower or working-class, and the TH fronting and H-dropping are particular indicators of Cockney English.[10] However, their language is not distinctive or out-of-keeping within the context of the 'Daily Mirror' comics page which in this day's edition contains the following dialogue: 'Another squad cars arrived - but I can't see what's goin' on.' (*Buck Ryan*); 'Wassa bettin' you 'ave to get yer 'aircut, 'arry?!' (*The Larks*); and 'It's a pity *you* can't think up summing like that, eh? C'mon, let's go!' (*The Flutters*). Within the linguistic context of the cartoon page Cockney English is the norm, and characters only speak 'properly' or in 'received pronunciation' to denote poshness.

The drawn landscape is a scrappy, urban geography of old picket fence, opened and discarded tin cans and crabgrass. In the second panel Maisie chases behind Marlon, both of them running through the first half of a landscape-format panel towards the dominant circular focus of the frame, the mouth of a large concrete pipe, which was presumably at some point awaiting transport and installation for water or sewage. However, it appears to be set into the ground, apparently abandoned. A tree grows beside the pipe and a picket fence runs adjacent, suggesting fixedness. Inside the mouth of the pipe stands a small figure wrapped in a Gannex-type raincoat with a dark-checked fedora or trilby hat pulled down over their face, a checked scarf and their hands behind their back, like a midget George Raft. Also peering from inside at the approaching pair is a shaggy dog's face, and further behind that is the top corner of a television set. In the lower right of the panel a speech balloon reads 'Ker-umbs, Wellin'ton, you must be pretty clever!'. The placement of this speech balloon inhabits dead space in the second panel's foreground, and also foregrounds the third panel which is a taller, portrait-shaped space which contains all the four characters in a democratically scaled arrangement within the pipe space. Wellington responds to Marlon's praise with the words 'Oh! I don't know …'. This half-statement of mock humility in turn leads the reader to the final panel, the same size as the third panel but a close-up of Wellington and Old Boot, where Wellington delivers the notional punchline 'Any other genius could 'ave done the same!'. As a narrative coda to this declaration the large, smiling dog thinks 'Oh! These perishing kids!' which serves as clarification that these are indeed the titular Perishers. The spoken 'Oh!' and the raised eyebrows and smile suggest an almost paternal indulgence.

Although *The Perishers* replaced *Belinda*, it was not a physical like-for-like replacement on the page. Instead, *The Perishers* took up the position occupied by *Garth* on the cartoon page

[10] http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/transcree.htm (Accessed 11 June 2012).

second up from the bottom with *Garth* taking up the place vacated by *Belinda* third from the top. Running down the page, therefore, the strip order was now *Buck Ryan*, then *The Larks*, *Garth*, *The Flutters*, *The Perishers* and finally *Romeo Brown*.



Fig 5.6 'Daily Mirror' cartoon page, Monday 19th October 1959

In the second daily strip (S250) the scene is again Wellington's pipe home, and gathered around the TV set are Marlon and Maisie sitting on school desks and, on the floor in the space customarily inhabited by the family child when watching TV, a toddler wearing a patterned bobble hat.



Fig 5.7 *The Perishers* (S250), 20th October 1959 (Uncollected)

This is Baby Grumpling, who is Maisie's younger brother as Linus van Pelt is Lucy's younger brother in *Peanuts*. On the TV's supposed 'screen' a trio of mice wearing top hats and holding canes perform a dance routine. Marlon affirms Wellington's self-assessment from the previous day by declaring 'Ker-umbs – Wellin'ton, fancy buildin' a television set – you're a real genius!' The programme ends with Wellington winding a crank at the side of the set to lower a curtain reading 'THE END.' He opens the back of the set to reveal an empty wooden box with a group of live mice inside.



Fig 5.8 *The Perishers* (S251), 21st October 1959 (Uncollected)

In the third strip Marlon, Maisie and a group of three new children have assembled inside the pipe to watch Wellington's performing mice, believing them to be a real TV programme, while Wellington has taken on the dual role of host and usherette tray holder selling 'Choc-lits' and 'Pea Nuts'. Boot, or rather 'Ole Boot, Wellin'tons Dog!' as he is formally identified by a pigtailed little girl, has taken a close interest in the 'mice.' He is frowning at the screen and, in the second panel, is examining it from above while one of 'the other kids' notes 'He thinks there's *real* mice in there'. In the final panel an off-panel child declares that 'dogs *are* a bit stupid', while Boot fixes the reader with a long-suffering look while a mouse blows a raspberry at him.



Fig 5.10 *The Perishers* (S253*)*, 22nd October 1959 (Uncollected)

In the final strip of the first week's sequence Maisie is increasingly suspicious of the legitimacy of 'Wellin'ton's' homemade TV set and pushes Wellington away to wrench open the back of the set box, only to be chased out of the pipe by the freed mice who, racing behind her and sending up puffs of dust in their wake, chase her grinning and rat-like out of the pipe with her shrieking and holding up her skirts. There is a verbal and visual agitation or excitement to this strip, with 'zip ribbons' visually denoting speed or movement in every panel. The bottom of the panel floor border is also the floor of the pipe, emphasising the depth of field within the frame.

The first few months of *The Perishers* is highly uneven visually and in terms of story content. Characters' features, identifying characteristics and personalities seem very fluid. Similarly to *Peanuts*, there is clearly an element of 'learning on the job.' The tone is variable and the social hierarchies of the cast are still being established. As Dodd noted, when he began writing *The Perishers* Marlon and Maisie were 'two of the original characters who survived. Wellington had been there at tone time but seemed to have retired prematurely, so I had to invent Boot to seek and drag him out from whatever musty corner he'd crept into'.[11] With no available copies of the northern edition of the 'Daily Mirror' from February 1958 to October 1959, it is not possible to confirm who was despatched in Dodd's cull.



Fig 5.11 *The Perishers* (S254*)*, 24th October 1959 (Uncollected)

[11] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 3.

In the second narrative sequence the new location is the children's schoolroom. A teacher appears in the last panel, the first adult authority figure. He is a fusty, elderly, balding, big-nosed, bespectacled archetype. The third panel is an 'open' panel, 'open' meaning it is not enclosed by black panel borders. There is a sense of empty space or 'fresh air' around the prone figure of Boot as he pours milk into his mouth. The top half of the panel is filled with speech balloons of the children repeatedly calling 'an' mine', informing Boot he can drink their milk too, and the time taken to read the chorus of voices allows the empty milk bottles to accumulate around Boot.

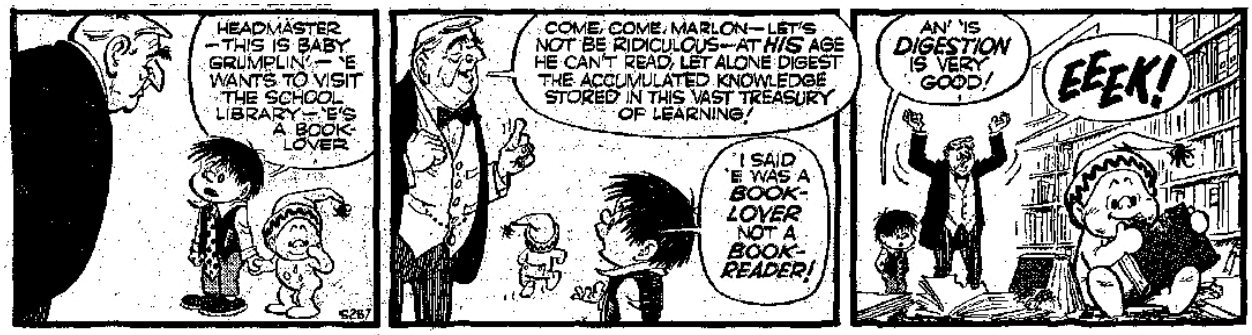


Fig 5.12 *The Perishers* (S257), 28th October 1959 (Uncollected)

The school sequence fully introduces Baby Grumpling to the strip. At this early stage he is a baby, mute, but still apparently capable of superhuman feats of destruction. The visual slapstick continues with Grumpling first eating a book and then his way through the library wall.



Fig 5.13 *The Perishers* (S258), 29th October 1959 (Uncollected)

In this strip a notable formal detail is Marlon hanging onto and pulling in the first panel border; as he attempts to physically restrain the fist-waving headmaster Marlon is buckling the panel 'wall' out of shape. Even if it only a throwaway visual pun, it is nevertheless indicative of an awareness of formal play still rare in the period.



Fig 5.14 *The Perishers* (S289), 4th December 1959 (Uncollected)

Here is the first solo appearance of Wellington, briefly alone with his thoughts until he sees the approaching Bully Bloggs. Bloggs, together with *Peanuts* teacher Miss Othmar or 'Dad's Army' character Captain Mainwaring's wife Elizabeth, belongs to the category of unseen characters that are discussed and communicated with but are never, or at most only partially heard or seen. Throughout the strip's history Wellington makes various efforts to assault, negotiate with, placate or avoid his nemesis. He attempts to gauge Bloggs' nationality by variously adopting Welsh, Scottish or Irish national dress or accents, which all inevitably culminate in a 'bashing'. This strip consists of four images but with a white space between panels three and four where the 'bashing' occurs. This empty panel functions as a silent 'beat' building to the verbal and visual punchline.

The strip also marks the first appearance of a landscape or, more particularly, an urban community. The cluster of lines at the far left of the first panel show the end of a row of terraced houses, a front elevation and a church spire. A tiny few dashes of brush intimate a washing line or a porch. The architectural assemblage of elements is also in the foreground where the edge of a fence, a housebrick and three stones are drawn. For the first time a sense of the outside world of *The Perishers* is being suggested.



Fig 5.15 *The Perishers* (S296), 12th December 1959 (Uncollected)

In this strip Maisie knits Wellington the deerstalker that becomes his trademark headgear. This resolves the inherent problem of an eye-masked character, where the audience cannot interpret or empathise with the actions or emotions of an unreadable character.

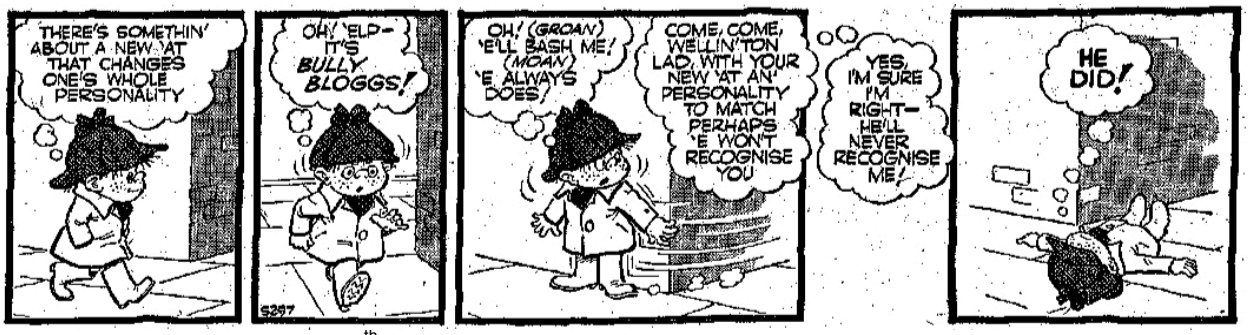


Fig 5.16 *The Perishers* (S297), 14th December 1959

The next day's strip marks the immediate visual shift. Wellington is shown walking down the street with a thought balloon reading 'There's somethin' about a new 'at that changes one's whole personality.' His newly revealed face is still a work-in-progress, his eyes drawn in a saucer style and hair drawn with single ink line 'spikes' rather than the delineated curling tufts which develop later, but this is the first appearance of the recognisable Wellington.

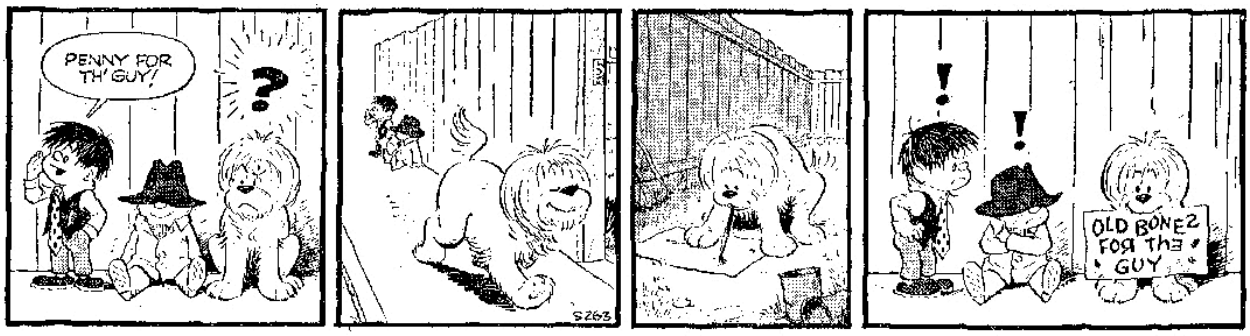


Fig 5.17 *The Perishers* (S263), 4th November 1959 (Uncollected)

The establishment of Old Boot's character is equally gradual. In an early 'Guy Fawkes' sequence Wellington is playing the guy when Boot, realising there is potential gain, disappears around a corner and writes onto a piece of card with a paintbrush lodged in his mouth. Much to Wellington and Marlon's apparent irritation but not surprise, he reappears with the sign reading 'OLD BONES FOR THE GUY'. This posits the question of whether the children are aware of Boot's intelligence and writing ability, and demonstrates the characters' unclear relationships at this early stage of the strip.

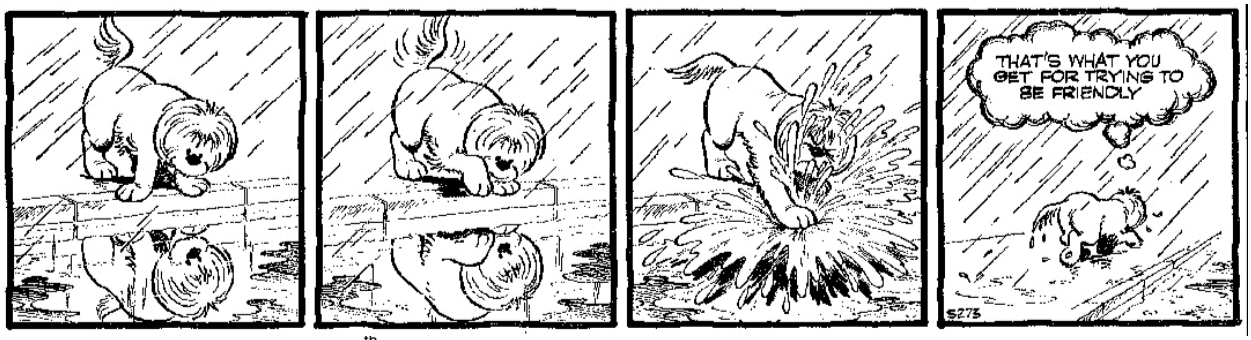


Fig 5.18 *The Perishers* (S273), 16th November 1959 (Uncollected)

This strip marks a clear development in Boot's characterisation. Rain falls diagonally across the panel as he stares into his reflection in a collected pool of kerbside water. His reflection stares back. Boot tentatively lifts his paw and then forcefully attempts to touch his reflection. Water splashes up and into his face and he squints and frowns. He walks away down the rain-slick street and 'think-speaks' (for only the second time in the strip) 'That's what you get for trying to be friendly.' As in the first strip when Boot thought 'Oh! These Perishing kids!' his inner voice is still indeterminate and un-nuanced. There is no hint of the estuary, Cockney stylings of his human cohorts or the paternal tone of his first appearance. As Dodd noted of Boot's early look,

> This is the original Mk.1 Boot, conceived after my request to Dennis for a 'large, hairy dog', probably with some half-glimpsed, half-forgotten picture of an Old English Sheepdog in mind. Some time after Boot padded into the strip I moved to Shepperton and there saw an Old English Sheepdog face to face (yes, face to face, I was grovelling on the pavement for pennies at the time). We decided that Boot was an Old English Sheepdog (sort of) and Dennis set about making him look like the real thing. But this had to be a gradual process. We couldn't have a different looking Boot suddenly appearing in the strip. One snag was that Old English Sheepdogs have no tails. Our Boot had a rather large tail. So, over the months, Boot's tail gradually shrunk and you can see that by the end of the book he wags only a token tail. It wasn't until 1971 that we gritted our teeth and abolished his tail altogether.[12]

Boot's thought balloon is clouded with thick, shaded clouding lines as if what he is thinking is suffused with the same gloomy weather. This unusual technique, combined with Boot's disappearing figure, lend a diminished note to the final panel and a portent of the strip's emotional climate. There is an implied punchline but a slightly mournful edge to the characters' observation, the first inkling of the melancholic and bittersweet tone that *The Perishers* eventually establishes.

[12] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 6.

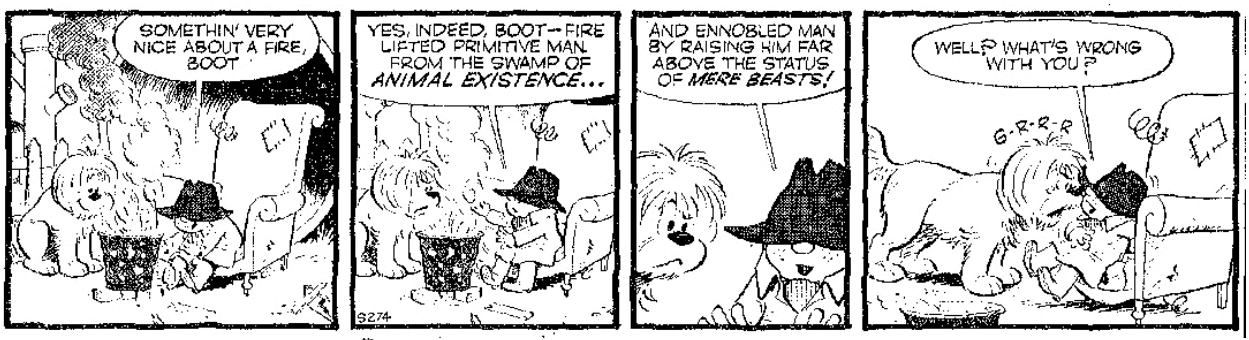


Fig 5.19 *The Perishers* (S274), 17th November 1959 (Uncollected)

This strip is the first indication of Boot and Wellington's private relationship. The two are outside the pipe-home huddled around a burning brazier. Wellington's rhapsodising over man's nature as 'above the status of mere beasts' raises Boot's ire, an indication of what will be a trope throughout the strip. The relationship is a comic double act, a convention developing in the TV sitcoms of 'Hancock's Half Hour', 'Steptoe & Son' and 'Morecambe and Wise'. The humour within this contract tends to be that one half, through ambition, pretension or desperation, constantly attempts to escape the confines of the shared situation but is thwarted by the weaker of the pair for whom any change to the status quo will threaten the security or stability of the co-dependency. However, often it is the supposed 'weaker' character's understanding of the escapee's vulnerability that is protecting them from failure. This interdependency is also contingent on mutual impoverishment or helplessness. With Wellington and Boot the relationship is interchangeable; both are susceptible to flights of fancy and ambition, and equally capable of derision or mockery.



Fig 5.20 *The Perishers* (T23), 27th January 1960 (Uncollected)

This is an example of both *The Perishers* strip's propensity for inclement weather and Collins' construction of time and space. In the first panel the children appear in the middle distance, cross through the central panel physically ahead of the reader's following eye, and disappear into silhouette over the horizon. The effect is a visual and temporal curving, as if the characters are emerging from the past, passing before the reader into the present and then disappearing into the future.



Fig 5.21 *The Perishers* (T41), 17th February 1960

Maurice exploited his knowledge of advertising gained from his years at Young & Rubicam when it was still a new industry and commercial television had only been on-air since 1955. This strip marks the first reference to 'Socko', a satirically all-purpose product like the 'Acme Corporation' merchandise in Chuck Jones' 'Road Runner' animated cartoons. 'Socko' appears recurrently as variously a 'new wonder' plant food, dog food, health drink, breakfast cereal and floor polish.



Fig 5.22 *The Perishers* (T104), 2nd May 1960

This strip marks the first use of the 'polyptych', a continuous strip of image showing an unbroken landscape upon which the narrative unfolds. Although the polyptych was one of the most significant stylistic elements of *The Perishers*, its use was not exclusive to the strip or unprecedented in newspaper comics history. Dodd acknowledged his awareness of the technique from Jon Millar Watt's English newspaper strip *Pop*, American cartoonist Frank King used a similar technique in Sunday editions of newspaper strip *Gasoline Alley*, and Charles Schulz occasionally deployed it in *Peanuts*. However, its usage in *The Perishers* and the many instances and variations of approach eclipse those precedents. In this example it is unusual that Wellington and Marlon are not seen in the middle panel, where conventionally they would be pictured walking through to reach the final panel. Instead they re-appear after the empty central panel, which in effect now exists in the past tense, and the reader catches back up with the boys in the present for the punchline.

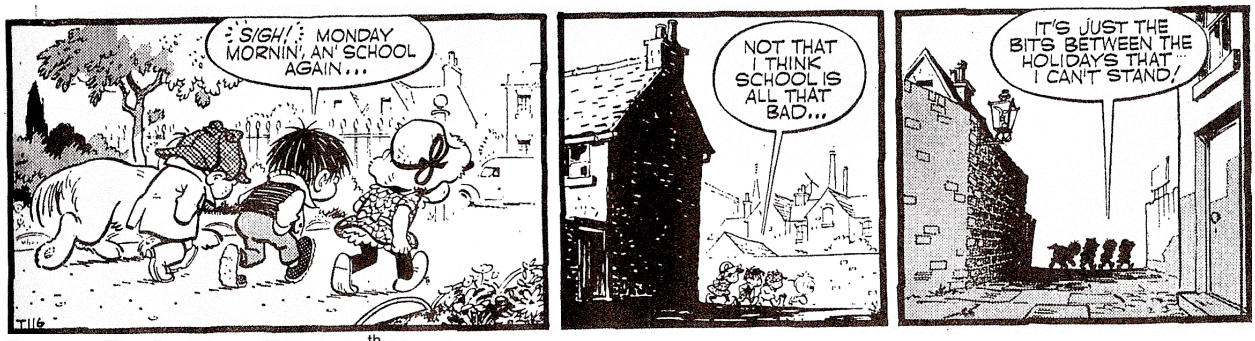


Fig 5.23 *The Perishers* (T116), 16th May 1960

This strip demonstrates a developing poetical sensibility in both text and image to describe the landscape within which *The Perishers* exist. The children trudge through a park and down a terraced street, crossing an alleyway, framed by chimney pots and fences. The texture recalls Richard Hoggart's *The Uses Of Literacy*, which evocatively describes the streets of 1950s working-class Britain as having 'the rhythm of a brick-world'.[13] The streets the characters traverse visibly diminish them, shrink them panel-by-panel and finally cast them into silhouette. As Pascal Lefevre has noted:

> Not all comics rely on the same amount of visualised space: in funny comic strips (e.g., *Peanuts* or *Garfield*) the backgrounds are quite minimal or even absent, while in adventure stories (e.g., *Tarzan*) lavish backgrounds of exotic places can be prominent and detailed.[14]

This and other *Perishers* strips contradict this basic tenet of cartooning. The level of background detail, the consistency of scale and the propensity for detailed backgrounds all run counter to the visual conventions of a humorous comic strip.

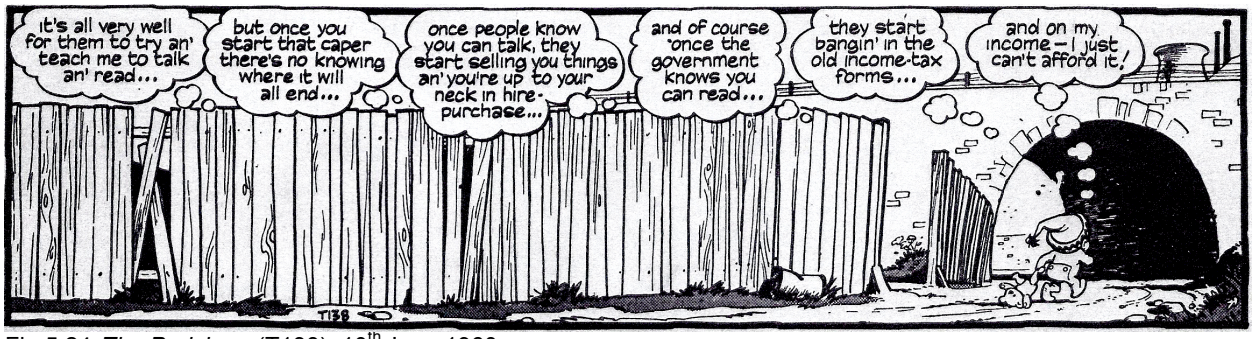


Fig 5.24 *The Perishers* (T138), 10th June 1960

This is the earliest example of a *Perishers* strip comprising only a single panel. Baby Grumpling's thought balloons commence at the far left and continue across the whole strip while he is shown only at the far right with the culminating thought balloon. The composition

[13] Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 53.
[14] Lefevre, 'The Construction of Space In Comics', from *A Comic Studies Reader*, p. 158.

either presumes a familiarity with the character in terms of recognizing his inner voice while reading or requires a preliminary scanning of the whole image before beginning to read. The landscape of a long fence leading to a brick railway arch with chimneys beyond recurs continuously through the strip's history.

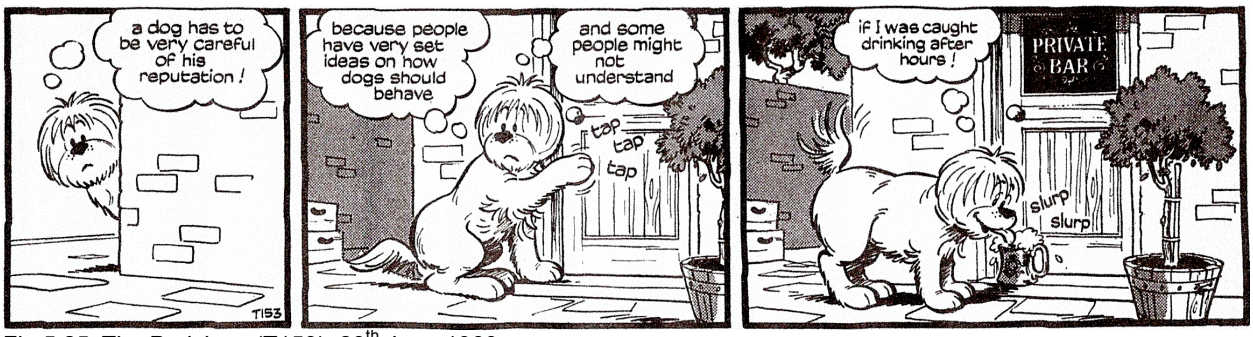


Fig 5.25 *The Perishers* (T153), 28th June 1960

This strip marks the revelation of Boot's secret drinking. When this strip was later reprinted Dodd reflected on the historical and autobiographical context:

> Shortly after Boot joined the strip we became aware that he was a keen student of pub architecture, tiptoeing in for a tipple when the opportunity arose, and sometimes showing a reluctance to abandon his studies at closing time. As time went on the pub began more and more to resemble the Three Horseshoes, Shepperton, where I myself have experienced similar difficulties. One of the strange coincidences with which this strip abounds.[15]

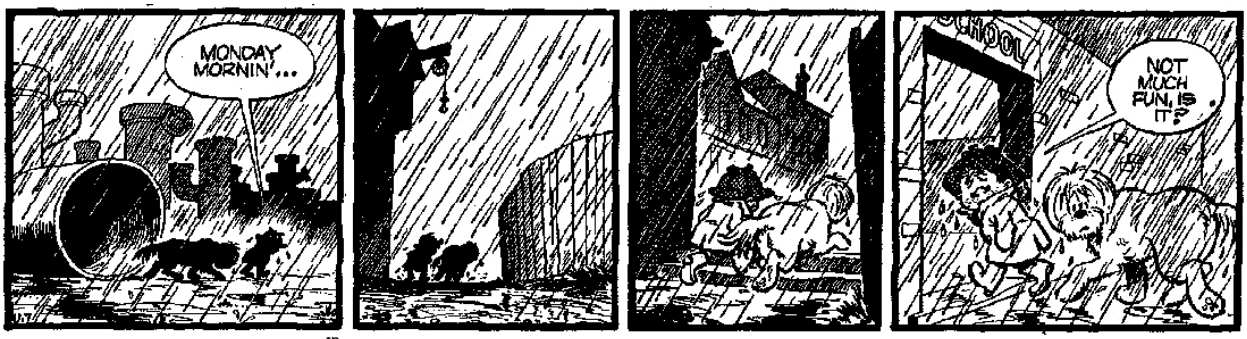


Fig 5.26 *The Perishers* (U7), 9th January 1961 (Uncollected)

At the beginning of 1961 Wellington and Boot are found trudging through the wind and rain together to school. The level of landscape depth is dense, with four gradations of tone in the pipeyard background from storm-lit white through to solid black silhouette with single hatching and cross-hatching in between. The two figures drip and splash through the rutted mud and broken brick of the pipeyard, along by the wooden fence, and up the stone steps to the school gates. The mood is thunderous and bleak. The theatrical notion of 'fourth wall' is broken by

[15] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 13.

both characters staring out at the reader in the final panel as Wellington acknowledges the drear quality of the strip with the glumly rhetorical 'Not much fun, is it?' In this simple statement masquerading as a punchline there is a direct relationship made with the reader, as if in acknowledgement of a shared response to the atmosphere of the strip. It seems to be a warning that this is how the year will start and probably continue.

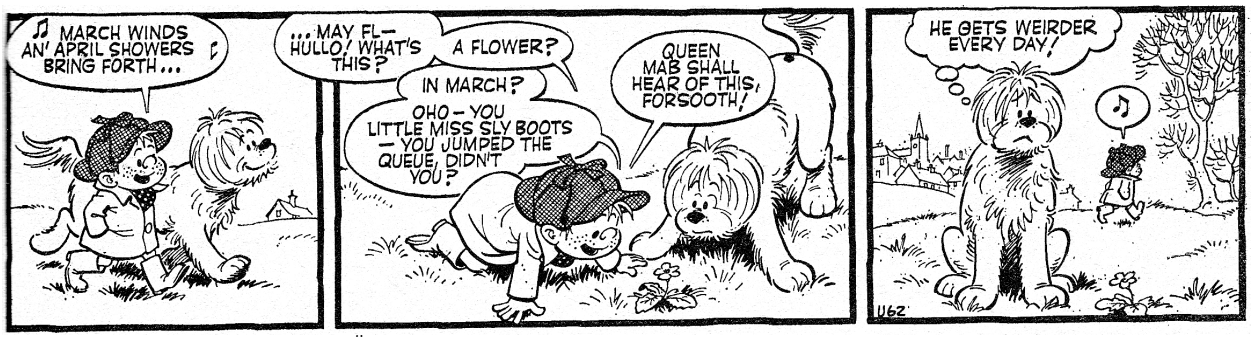


Fig 5.27 *The Perishers* (U62), 14th March 1961

Wellington's everyday speech is a combination of high and low sources, moving from poetry and theatre, popular song and proverb to slang rhetoric. He begins this strip singing the proverb lyrics from 1930s music-hall staple 'March Winds and April Showers.' He quotes Shakespeare or Shelley's writings on Celtic folklore figure Queen Mab, a miniature fairy who enters peoples' dreams. Wellington is suggesting the fairy woke the flower to bloom early. The specific origin of the phrase 'Little Miss Sly Boots' is unknown. The landscape in the background of the final panel is a cluster of church spire, terrace roofs and a distant factory chimney, emblematic of religion, the home and labour.



Fig 5.28 *The Perishers* (U86), 12th April 1961 (Uncollected)

This strip introduces Wellington's vocation as a seller of go-karts. This is his main business throughout the history of the strip; he builds them and then touts them to all passing potential consumers, although Marlon is quickly established as the target market. Secondary attempts at money-making include door-to-door selling, copywriting and fête-organising. Unlike *Peanuts*'

Charlie Brown, with his barber father and homemaker mother, Wellington is presumably orphaned, alone and forced to fend for himself.

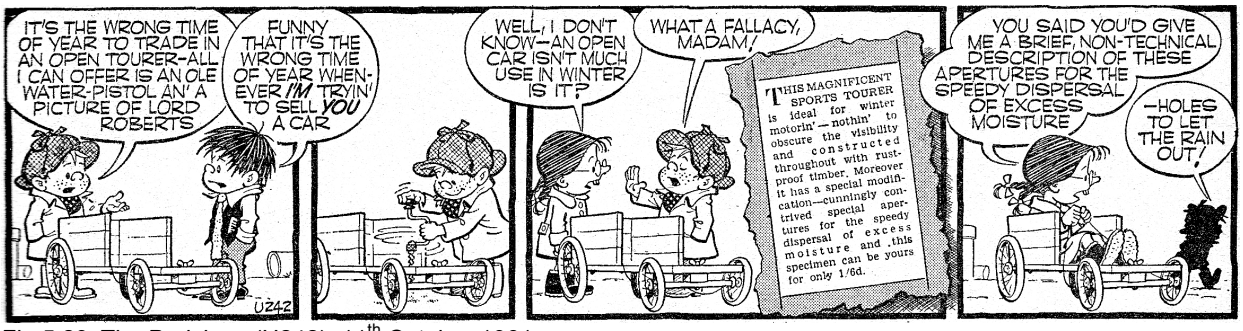


Fig 5.29 *The Perishers* (U242), 11th October 1961

In this strip Marlon trades in a buggy that Wellington then sells on to occasional character Plain Jane. Dodd drew on his relationship with his own car dealer Jack Allum whose philosophy son Mike recounts,

> My father watched the way Jack sold cars. And Jack didn't sell cars. What he would actually do is tell you you couldn't have what you wanted or you didn't want what you wanted. Until you were prepared to pay him almost any money for what you didn't want or what you couldn't have. And he put it to my father once – he said "You can't claim I'm lying, I'm not – I'm honestly dishonest". And Wellington said that once when Marlon's actually got the money for a car and Wellington says "Well, there's the car" and Marlon says "No, no, you've got to *sell* me the car!"[16]

Wellington deploys the same reverse-psychology in this strip and attempts to blind Jane with science by producing the actual text clipping from a newspaper supporting his counter-argument.

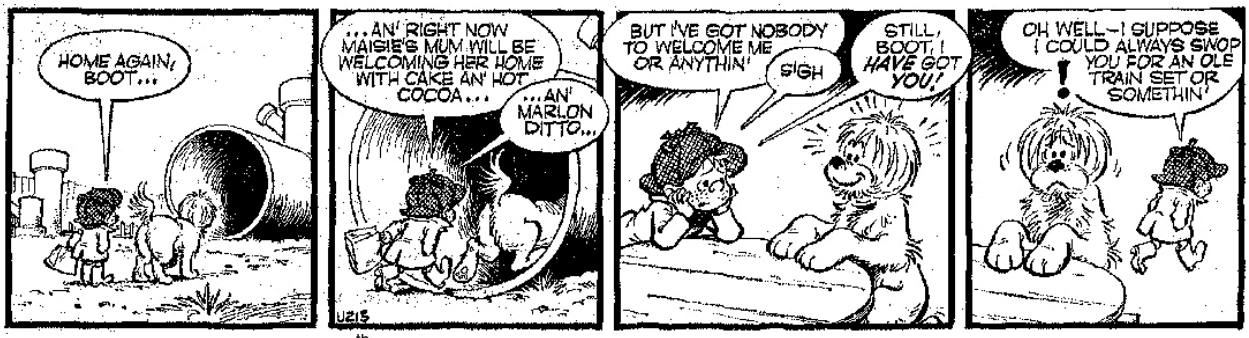


Fig 5.30 *The Perishers* (U213), 7th September 1961 (Uncollected)

This is a rare instance where Wellington mentions his orphan status. Hunger and poverty are common experiences for Boot and Wellington, and in this strip the dark maw of the pipe entrance visually matches Wellington's plaintive observation that 'Maisie's mum will be

[16] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.

welcoming her home with cake an' hot cocoa … an' Marlon ditto … but I've got nobody to welcome me or anythin'.' Wellington takes brief comfort from Boot's presence before coldly reducing that companionship to barter status. Dodd later elaborated on the staging of the early strips:

> When Dennis and I first set up business we moved Wellington and Boot into a huge concrete pipe in an abandoned pipe-yard. The pipe-yard was originally owned by a man who, during the last world war, was convinced that the first things housewives would want on the cessation of hostilities were six-foot diameter concrete pipes, so he built up a black-market store in a field. Alas, he had miscalculated the market and retired to Scunthorpe to study Yoga.[17]

In this scenario Dodd is evoking the character of the wartime spiv. The intrinsic comedy in the explanation was the absurdity of such a stock personality moving north to study yoga, and also the incongruity of anyone practicing yoga in Scunthorpe, a name which has historically been considered amusing mainly because it contains the 'c' word.



Fig 5.31 *The Perishers* (U187), 8th August 1961 (Uncollected)

In this strip Wellington turns his hand to Dodd's own career as advertising copywriter, particularly 'above-the-line' slogans like the 'Clunk-Click' adverts Dodd wrote in the late 1960s. As he noted:

> I often borrow from, or mention, advertising in the strip; after all, advertising is part of our everyday life. People have sometimes said that Dennis and I must get a lot of perks from the companies we mention. This is not so. I once got a case of beans from Heinz, and Harrods were kind enough to send a coffee percolator-but that's been the total score up to now. I mean-the strip often mentions "That nice Mr. Wilson", but neither Dennis nor myself has appeared in the Birthday Honours List to date.[18]

[17] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 175.
[18] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus No. 2*, p. 29.

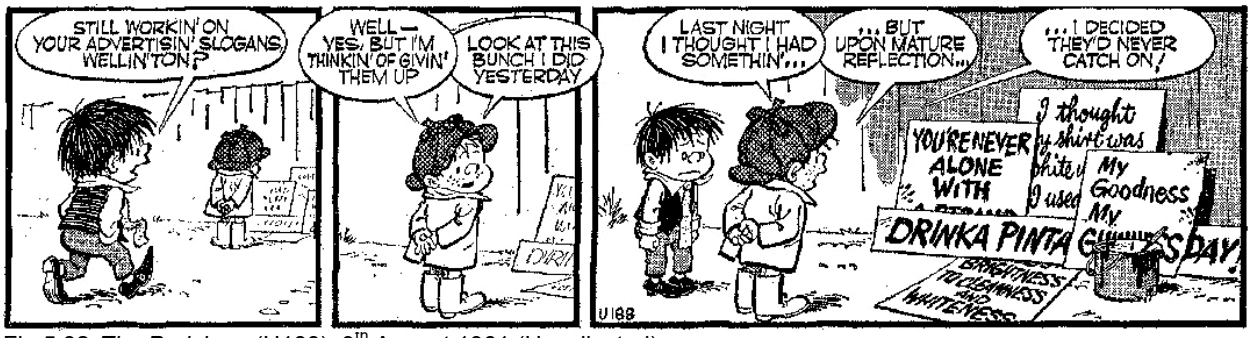


Fig 5.32 *The Perishers* (U188), 9th August 1961 (Uncollected)

However, when Wellington loses confidence in his attempts, Dodd addresses the nature of writers' block, an anxiety he personally experienced. Son Mike explained his father's strategy:

> He was always terrified of what authors call 'white sheet fever' where you put the paper in the typewriter and look at it and nothing happens. You haven't got an idea in your head, you've got no idea what to do. He used to get this when he was an advertising copywriter and the first thing was he'd sit there and write 'tram nam blimph' across the top because it broke up the white space. A bit of psychological self-persuasion probably. So the result was he was always on the lookout for things that could give rise to a smile, a laugh and all the rest of it.[19]

After Wellington and Old Boot the most significant characters in the strip are Maisie and Marlon, whose equivalents in *Peanuts* would be Linus and Lucy van Pelt. However, rather than big sister and little brother they are, as Dodd writes, 'the nearest thing to romance in the strip.'[20] Therefore their relationship is closer to Lucy and Schroeder the Beethoven-loving classical toy piano-player. Similarly to Lucy, Maisie is alternately flirtatious, bullying, needy, manipulative and violent. However, where Schroeder is a prodigy and has his classical instrument, Marlon is a gormless scruff who twangs a detuned and smoking electric guitar.

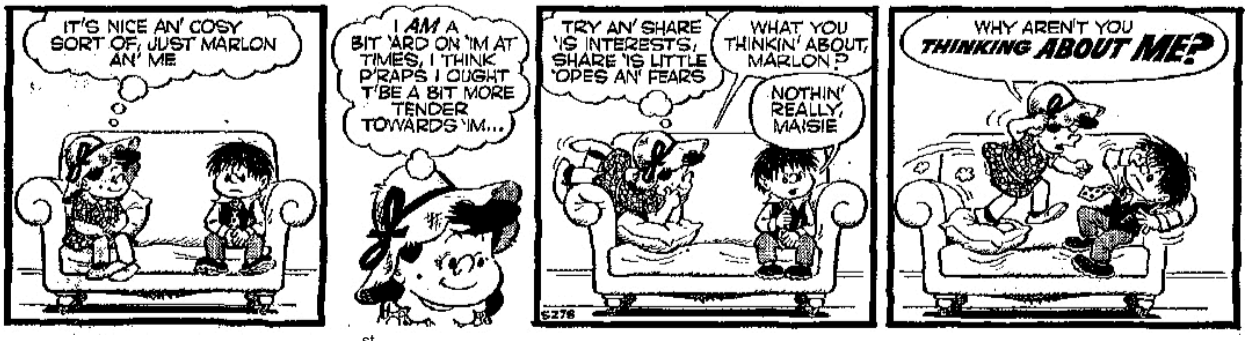


Fig 5.33 *The Perishers* (S278), 21st November 1959 (Uncollected)

The above strip introduces and sets the template for the fundamental power structure of their relationship. They are sitting on a sofa, the first moment in the strip when they have been alone

[19] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.
[20] Dodd, *The Perishers Book 1*, p. 4.

together. Until now their liaisons have either been in the street, the school or Wellington's pipe-home. The sofa and skirting board are not in disrepair like everything else in the strip so far and suggest relative comfort. They are squashed at either end as far from each other as possible. Maisie, hands clasped and feet twisted with excited expectancy, gazes at Marlon. However, what she is misreading as his thoughtfulness and her desire to 'share 'is little 'opes and fears' turns to fury when he reveals he is thinking 'Nothin really' and his expression is mere vacancy. This is a template for the couple's relationship throughout the strip's history.

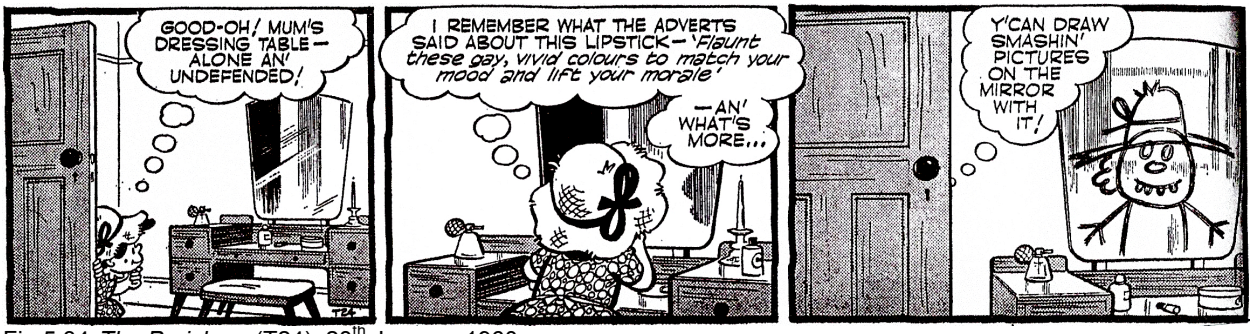


Fig 5.34 *The Perishers* (T24), 28th January 1960

Maisie often exhibits ambitions to 'womanhood' and here sneaks into her mother's bedroom apparently to borrow and apply make-up, but in actuality she is drawing on the mirror with lipstick. The last panel places the reader in the room with the curtained sash window behind them, 'hearing' Maisie from beyond the open door, revealing her self-portrait by her absence. This final drawing, with its perfume atomiser and orderly cosmetics, is a curiously intimate glimpse of the adult world Maisie is aspiring to.

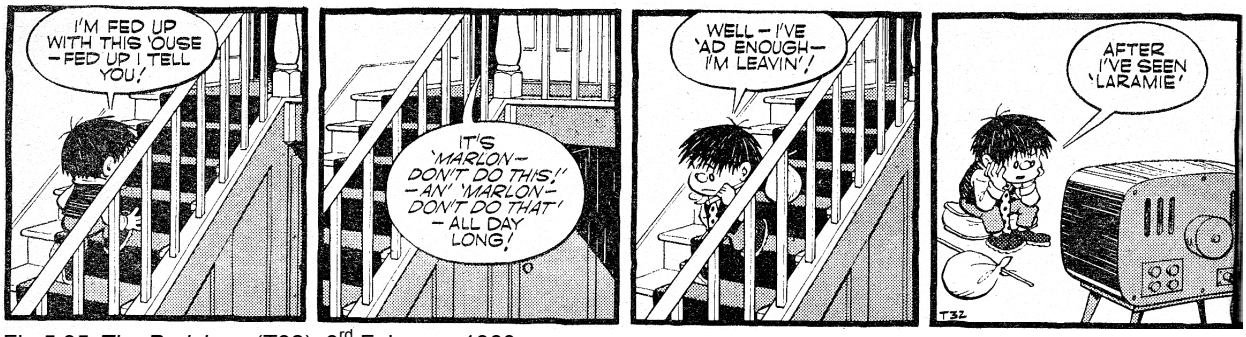


Fig 5.35 *The Perishers* (T32), 3rd February 1960

This is an example of another developing stylistic trope, that of the fixed viewpoint. Often a strip narrative takes place in an interstitial space such as a hallway or corridor. In this early version Marlon is upset at some domestic disagreement and, Dick Whittington-style, packs his possessions into a handkerchief tied to a pole to run away from home, until the lure of television makes him stay. The width of the frame expands in the second panel to include Marlon's bedroom door, and then contracts in the third when he descends the stairs. This

subtle shift of scale extends the 'reading' of the second panel as Marlon gathers his belongings and contracts the duration of the third to increase the rapidity of 'reading' his descent. Finally he is depicted watching TV in an otherwise empty space, the absence of any room detail suggesting his total engrossment in the unseen western.



Fig 5.36 *The Perishers* (T128), 30th May 1960 (Uncollected)

This strip repeats the fixed point-of-view composition but places it within a landscape. Despite the poor reproduction of this digital file, the background is discernible as two tiers of terraced houses, one in the foreground and a higher level of housing behind a viaduct bridge. The middle ground is a patch of wasteland, and in the foreground assorted detritus is scattered and a tyre propped against a warped and decrepit timber fence. Maisie and Marlon's voices can be heard behind the fence discussing plans for the following day's school outing, culminating with Marlon's pitiable request for Maisie to take her foot off his neck now he has acceded to her demands. What makes the strip unusual is the visual absence of a described action. The verbal reference *to* and visual absence *of* Maisie pinning Marlon down creates an image of the unseen action in the reader's mind.

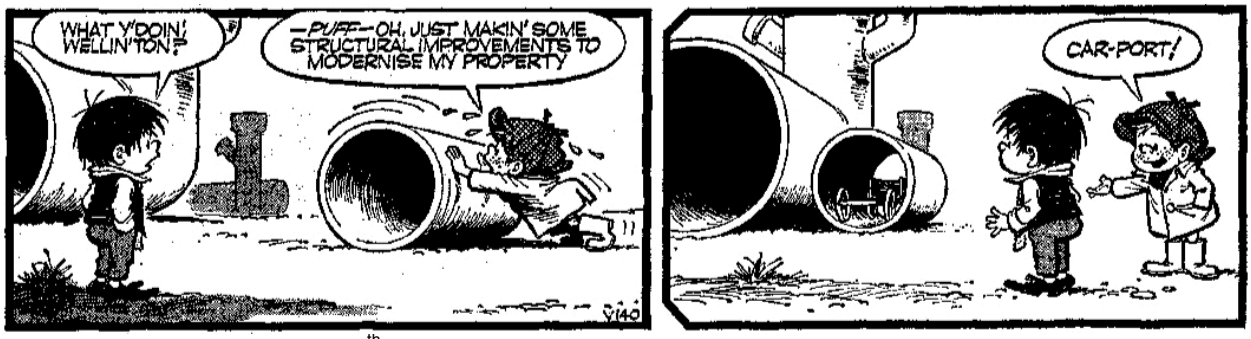


Fig 5.37 *The Perishers* (V140), 13th June 1962 (Uncollected)

An unusual formal device in this strip is the 'trimming' of the left-hand corners in the second panel. This serves to edit the passage of time; the two panel borders do not completely abut which visually indicates a greater temporal distance between the panels. This makes sense of the fact that Wellington's car-port has suddenly 'arrived' next to the pipe home while Wellington

is the other side of Marlon from the physical effort required; the trimmed borders have visually extended the time required to complete moving the pipe into position, park his buggy and step back from it.



Fig 5.38 *The Perishers* (V118), 18th May 1962

This is formally a conventional 'gag' strip for the first three panels, following the language of setup, structure, development and fulfilment. In the first panel Wellington summarises his latest buggy sale by telling Boot he has 'just sold another used car.' He then details his business acumen as a 'sharp deal' and 'superb salesmanship', culminating in the undercutting pay-off that he now has a load of new junk to replace the cart that he sold. However, there is a fourth panel showing the silhouettes of a departing Marlon and Maisie (or returning again as the figures have swapped sides from the first panel?) pushed to the edge of the strip by the encroaching fence. This silent coda to the strip adds a melancholy and oblique ending. In the first panel Maisie is talking to a smiling and attentive Marlon and the final panel suggests the continuation of an unheard conversation.

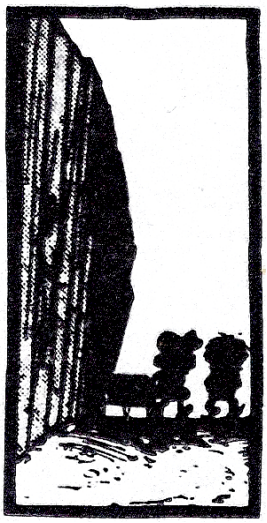


Fig 5.39 *The Perishers* (V118) (detail), 18th May 1962

There is something intensely personal and private in the body language of the departing children, and oddly furtive as a reading experience. The wall dividing Wellington from seeing

Marlon and Maisie implicates the reader as solely and voyeuristically watching the pair. They are touchingly walking in lockstep, and the use of silhouette creates an unreadable intimacy between them.



Fig 5.40 *The Perishers* (V92), 17th April 1962

This strip demonstrates the developing linguistic complexity of the strip. When the narrative is a sequence of fixed-perspective pictures, the dialogue becomes the focal point for the reader. Maisie is unusually cooking for Wellington, but the scenario and language are borrowed from a cookery programme as if the two are mimicking a conversation between chef and patron. Wellington's critical assessment of the dish that 'it has certain muted salivatory undertones with a pathetic kind of flavour – altogether I would say a resounding culinary failure' is delivered with a dispassionate hauteur.

Where Marlon and Maisie provide the strip's version of romantic interest, Baby Grumpling is the truly childlike element of the strip. Grumpling functions as the innocent, guileless, reflexively irresponsible infant. As such there is no expectation of rational behaviour from him; rather, he represents the unfettered 'Id'. Similarly to Boot, Grumpling can break the rules of reality in a way the other *Perishers* characters cannot. Later Wellington's radio will communicate signals from past historical events, the moon speak and Maisie believe Harold Wilson is subliminally communicating with her, but the other children essentially function within the laws of physics. In contrast Grumpling burrows vast distances under the ground, lives on a diet of worms and occasionally levitates.

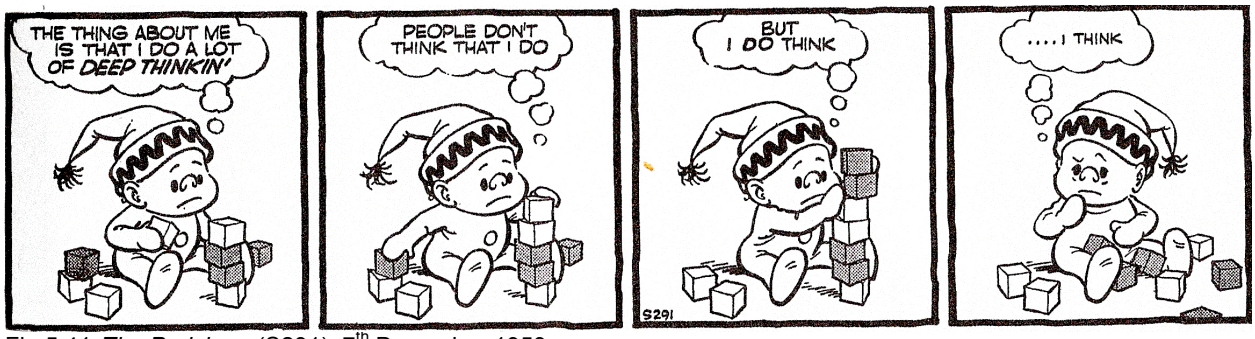


Fig 5.41 *The Perishers* (S291), 7th December 1959

This strip marks both his first 'solo' appearance and his first 'thoughts', a conflation of Cartesian and phenomenological theory. He will not begin to speak for nearly another three years so his consideration of events is represented as thought balloons. As Dodd noted in the first book collection, 'Baby Grumpling can't talk yet, but he's got his own way of communicating. He clobbers everyone with a well-aimed brick !'[21]

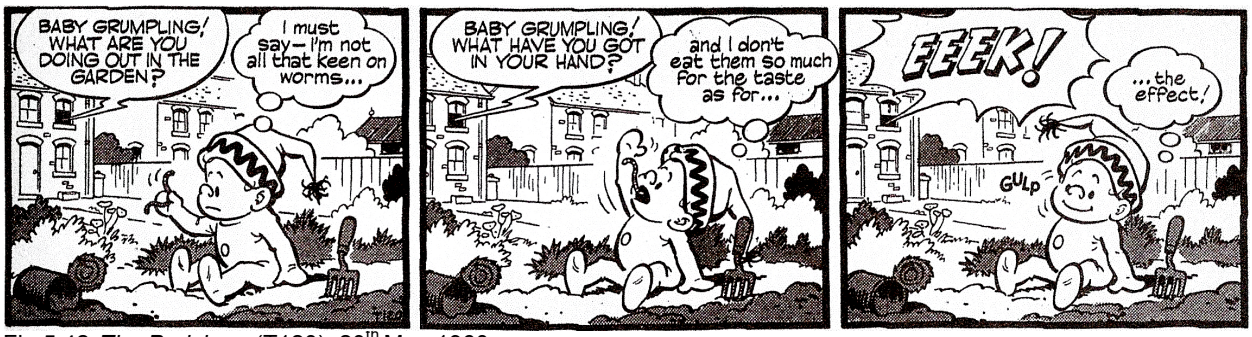


Fig 5.42 *The Perishers* (T120), 20th May 1960

Baby Grumpling's main food source is worms, as he notes here, not 'so much for the taste as for the effect.' This strip shows Collins' increasing use of tone and line to achieve a sense of space in the strips; foreground, middle ground and backgrounds are all picked out in half-tone. The application of these techniques pulls the tin can in the foreground towards the viewer and diminishes the hatched roof in the distance. At first Grumpling's musings are in capital letters but by 1960 he thinks and later speaks in lower case text, the diminished font representing his baby status.

[21] Dodd, *The Perishers Book 1*, p. 5.

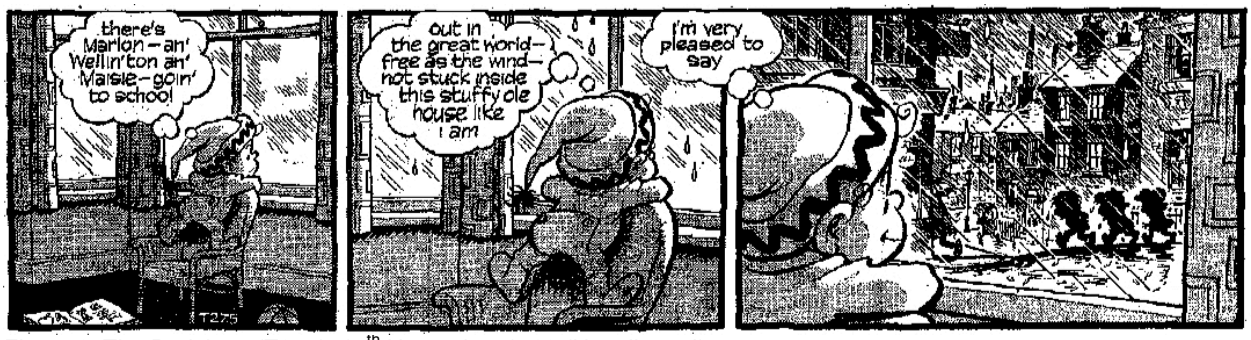


Fig 5.43 *The Perishers* (T275), 17th November 1960 (Uncollected)

Grumpling stands perched with his feet on the arms of a chair in the bay of the window. The rain outside is torrential and the storm-lit roof slates glow with wet cold. In the street Marlon, Wellington and Maisie are heading down the hill for school, walking in single file. For now Grumpling is happy in the safety and security of babyhood.

As well as the children and dogs in *The Perishers*, there are a group of assorted fauna whose adventures alternate and sometimes overlap with those of the main characters. These are the beetles, caterpillars, butterflies, spiders and tortoise that regularly make appearances in the strip. This type of secondary cast is a rare occurrence in a British strip. Historically some American newspaper strips like *Krazy Kat* and *Gasoline Alley* contained a subsidiary strip called a 'topper' that would run beneath the main strip and in some way relate to the main content, and this is the closest formal equivalent to *The Perishers*' coincidental and parallel narratives.

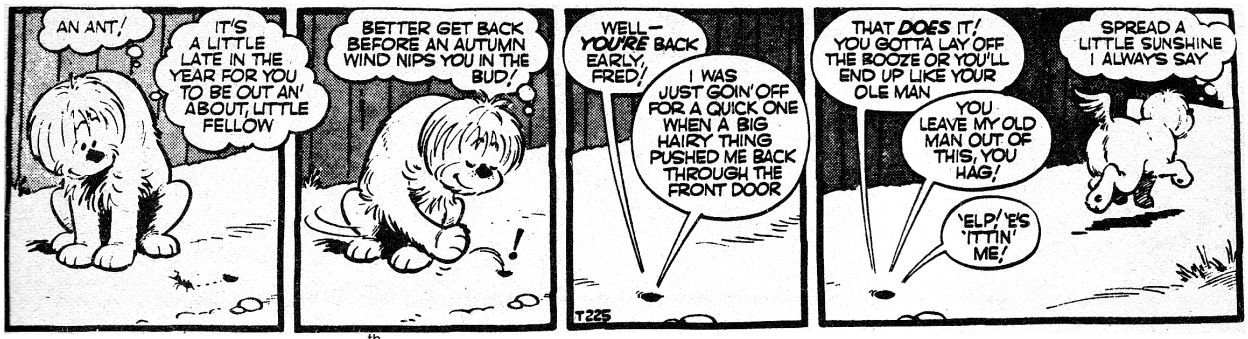


Fig 5.44 *The Perishers* (T225), 20th September 1960

The first of this group of characters to appear, initially identified as an ant, would come to be regular character Fred Beetle. Dodd summarised his origin story in typical punning style:

> The ant who makes a brief appearance above, was to become, in time, Fred the disgruntle beetle who takes over the strip in unguarded moments. Fred's gruntle became dis'd when he had to spend a few

centuries with an Egyptian Mummy who was too wrapped up in himself to engage Fred in conversation. Fred has never forgotten this slight and has consequently developed left-carapace leanings.[22]

Thus Dodd sets out Fred's political identity as socialist as a result of social slighting rather than any ideological commitment. This is a critique consistent with other political opinions expressed throughout the strip and supports son Mike's assertion that his father's politics moved from left to right with the passing of time.

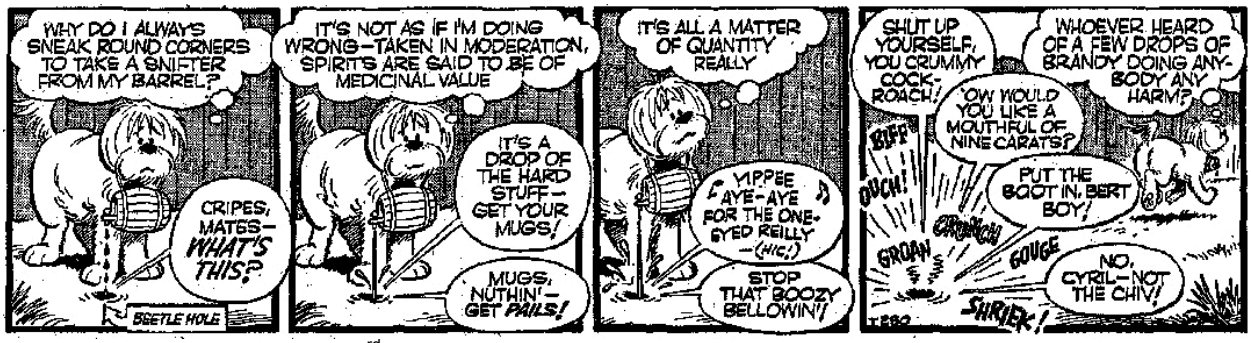


Fig 5.45 *The Perishers* (T280), 23rd November 1960 (Uncollected)

Fred's second appearance begins with Boot's barrel leaking brandy into an insect's burrow in the ground conveniently labelled 'BEETLE HOLE.' The insects start imbibing and then singing the Irish drinking song known as 'One-Eyed Riley' or 'Riley's Daughter.' This sets a pattern for the insects quoting of bawdy, often outright obscene songs, the joke being the singing is interrupted before the inevitable expletives start. The cries of 'Put the boot in, Bert boy!' and 'No, Cyril – not the chiv!' suggests a knife-fight breaking out.



Fig 5.46 *The Perishers* (U83), 8tn April 1961 (Uncollected)

This strip details Fred Beetle's negotiations with officialdom after 'Socko' has grown his marrow home to monster-size. It also coincides with the period when the Dodd family left their council flat and bought their family house in Shepperton, and seems to be Dodd's parting shot to the restrictive nature of social housing. When Fred complains that their marrow property has

[22] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 19.

become ‘about a hunnerd times bigger’ the official response is to ‘increase the rates!’. As Mike Dodd notes of his father,

> One of the things that really irritated him was the attitude of the local authority because he painted the front door of our maisonette and the Council came round and told him he had to put it back the same colour. They dictated the colour which he didn’t like very much. But what they were saying is ‘you are not allowed to look after this property, we look after it’. You’re not allowed to do anything to it at all.[23]



Fig 5.47 *The Perishers* (U136), 9th June 1961

While the insects know what the children are saying, it’s unlikely that the children comprehend them, although Boot and the other dogs understand everyone. This relative ambiguity of communication between species is a frequent trope in comic strips; Boot, Fred Bassett and Snoopy all directly respond in thought balloons to human conversation while not being ‘heard.’

The ‘Eyeballs-In-The-Sky!’

As well as the adventures of the children and insects, there is one other significant narrative element of the strip. In the first *Perishers Omnibus* in 1974 Maurice Dodd recounts a family holiday to Dorset where the idea originated:

> This all began at a place called Eype’s Mouth, where a small river runs into the sea between eroding cliffs. There is a long stretch of strangely orange-coloured beach at the end of which there used to be a surrealist jumble of rocks and debris from the falling cliffs, forming a lido of rock pools. A place for family to spend a day far from the dreaded trannies, and sheltered from the heavy fall of ice-cream cartons and confectionery wrappings which occur on most coastal trips.
>
> The regiment (consisting of self, wife, four children and dog) would form up with full pack in the early hours and march up the beach. All this was worthwhile because, once at its destination, the family could not bring itself to face the return journey until late afternoon. The saving in ice-creams was enormous.

[23] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.

> On one of these expeditions, huddling from the driving rain under a makeshift bivouac of tatty car-rugs, I saw my dog peering down into a rock pool and wondered what the crabs made of it all. Hence was born the 'Eyeballs in the Sky', although the phrase was not used until later episodes.
>
> I didn't know what I'd started. The eyeballs in the sky are now expected to appear for a number of days annually, and I fair dreads it.[24]

Dodd later revised and added to this account of the initial inspiration behind the newspaper strip's most famous annual event:

> Once at the rock-pools the main occupation was 'crabbing'. This consisted of lowering lines baited with scraps of food into the pools, thus enticing small crabs to scuttle from concealment and grasp the offerings in eager claws, whereupon they were hauled up and deposited in a bucket of water, to be tipped back, no doubt thinking that there must be more to life than this, at the end of the day.
>
> On this particular occasion I was cunningly avoiding parental responsibility under a makeshift bivouac of tatty car-rugs when I notice our dog, his eyes and muzzle submerged, peering into one of the pools. What then crossed my mind was the remembered observations of a philosopher, regarding a fish's view of an elephant crossing a stream. To the fishy eye the elephant would consist of four umbrella stands, four separate entities perambulating with no apparent connection, giving no clue as to the bulking reality of the rest of the pachyderm above the waterline. "What" thought I "do the crabs in the pool make of the only part of my dog visible to them, peering down from their sky?" Thus was born the saga of the 'Pooliverse' and the 'Eyeballs-In-The-Sky'. Based on the crabs reaction to visitations by mysterious orbs breaking though the ceiling of their Pooliverse, the 'Eyeballs' constitute a reign of anarchy which takes over the strip each year. But at the time I little realised what my dog had started. The 'Eyeballs' began with a few isolated gags but are now expected to appear for several weeks at a stretch, by popular demand.[25]

The collective proper noun for a number of crabs is a 'cast' and that is the function they serve in the 'Eyeballs In The Sky' strips. The crabs are variously driven by idolatry, spectacle, consumption and gratification. Initially portrayed as religious or cult-like in nature, a congregation awaiting a sign or a prophet, they become the voice of the consumer, the silent majority, passive receptors, a Greek chorus crying out for narrative resolution, satiation or salvation, until ultimately they become a critical voice, the newspaper readership of the strip itself discussing the content of the narrative and motivations of its creators. As Dodd wrote of their expected appearances:

> As their time draws near I keep putting off the event but once having a reluctant start I find the feature generates it's own mad momentum, which drags me along in a scribbling fury. Packed with innuendo and double entendres, more of which end up in my bin than in the pages of the 'Mirror', it's frenetic brain-

[24] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 16.
[25] Dodd, *The Authentic Perishers*, www.theauthenticperishers.co.uk/mainmenu/maurice.htm (Accessed 11 July 2010).

boggling work, at the end of which I invariably feel the need of a short sharp holiday - preferably in West Dorset.

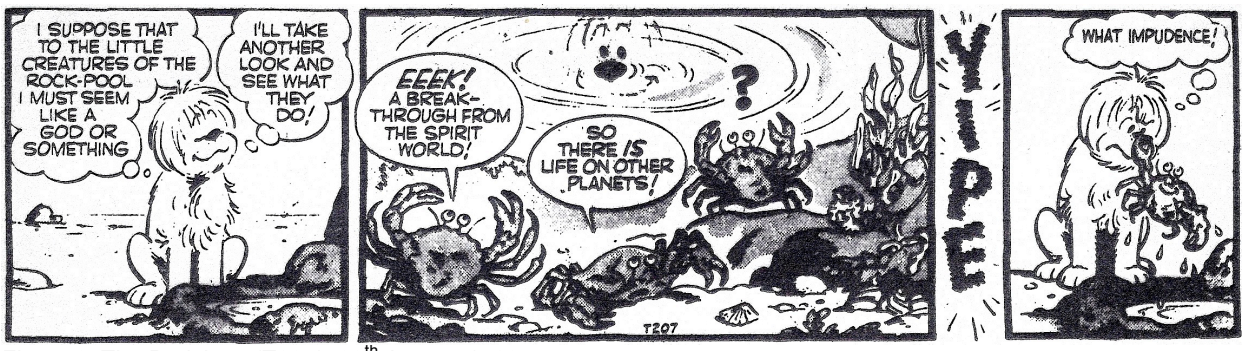


Fig 5.49 *The Perishers* (T207), 30th August 1960

In their first appearance in 1960 the crabs are named as Gerald, Charles and Rodney. Gerald's immediate response to the sight of Boot's nose breaking through the surface of the water as 'a sign - Ghastly – a sort of black blob' is greeted by derision and denial from the other two which swiftly deteriorates into a brawl. Boot's second exploratory dip into the pool is met with panic and confusion. This time, however, the crabs attempt to contextualise the image of Boot's face as either a 'breakthrough from the spirit world' or extraterrestrial in origin. The third crab responds by simply attacking, and ends up dangling from Boot's nose by a claw, a fighting response to an unknown aggressor. This encounter sets the template for all subsequent 'Eyeballs In The Sky' sequences where Boot's initial benign curiosity is met by ever-escalating and demented responses.

When researching this study and reading the whole history of *The Perishers* I was struck by how the crabs reflected, ironised and satirised the pop-cultural, social and political issues of the year. As the years passed this lexicon of quotes, sources and observations expanded and grew. I came to see the phrase 'Eyeballs In The Sky' as a metaphor for the imagination, that somehow a simple image of two black dots could eventually become a visual conduit to an entire and changing culture. The more I gazed into the past and the at the world of *The Perishers* the more I came to see myself as the embodiment of the Eyeballs In The Sky.

Summary

By the middle of 1962 Dodd and Collins have established most of the essential stylistic and formal elements of *The Perishers*. The characters inhabit a landscape visually part-way between a still Blitz-damaged greater London and an industrial Northern terraced town. Their concerns are childishly quotidian, revolving around surviving school and bullies, the English weather, summer seaside holidays, birthdays and parties.

5.2 The 'Classic Stage' (mid 1962-mid 1969)

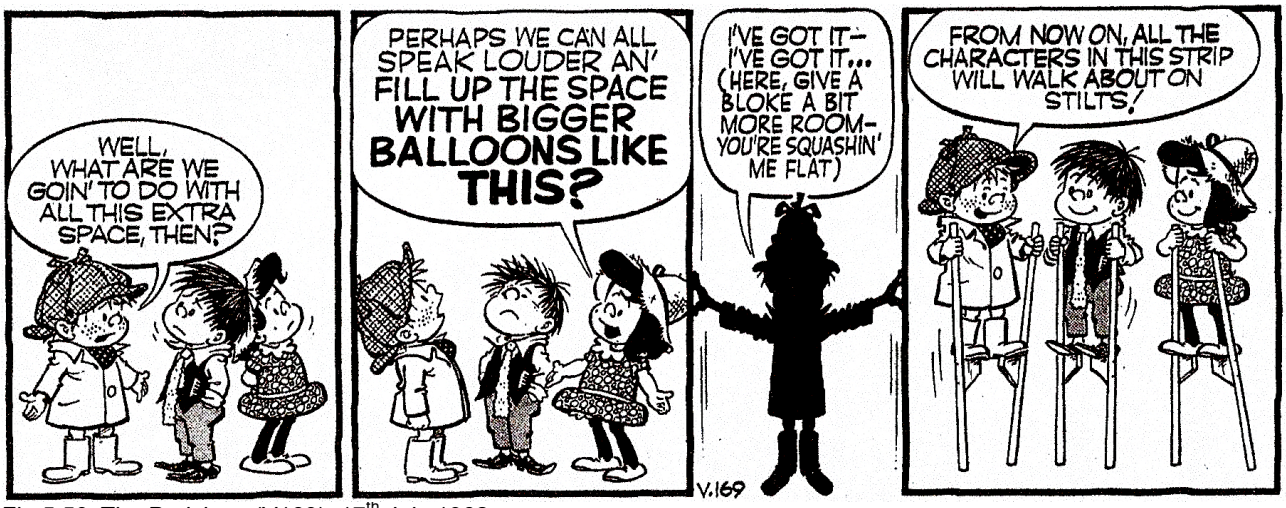


Fig 5.50 *The Perishers* (V169), 17th July 1962

In July 1962 *The Perishers* took up a solitary space on a page separate from the juxtaposition with other strips in the tiered cartoon page. The new format is known as a 'solus' position, the strip remaining the same width but being 50% taller. This allowed space for a greater amount of dialogue while retaining the same amount of image 'real estate', and marks the beginning of the 'Classic Stage'. The change had an immediate impact on the strip's verbal and visual development. Where before speech balloons often crowded down into the characters' image-space, now they could speak and act as two separate modes. The figures become less squat after the format change, with necks emerging from overcoats and jumpers, legs becoming longer and proportions more elegant. Dodd noted both shortcomings and possibilities of the format:

> It means that, when space is at a premium, the strip gets elbowed back into the sports pages where it feels a bit out of place, and is looked on with disfavour by the sports writers who've had to cut lurid descriptions of the gladiatorial contests of kick-ball or hit-ball to make room ... The unfamiliar grandeur of the new space had a heady effect on myself and Dennis, and we indulged in a bit of almost private drollery for the day.[26]

Said 'drollery' includes the strip breaking the 'fourth wall' when Wellington looks out at the reader in the final panel and says 'From now on, all the characters in this strip will walk about on stilts.' He distances himself further from his persona within the world of *The Perishers* by describing himself and the others as 'the characters.'

[26] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 243.

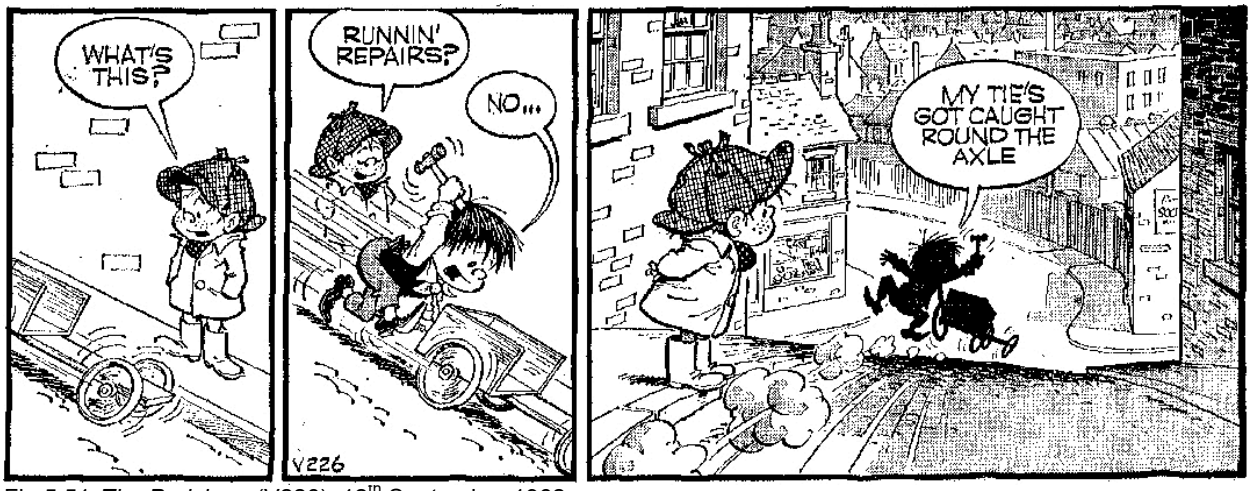


Fig 5.51 *The Perishers* (V226), 12th September 1962

This strip is an early example of the expanded sense of space available in the solus format. The first two panels show an out-of-control go-kart with Marlon pursuing and swinging at it with his hammer. In the final panel the punchline is that his tie is 'caught round the axle'. The detailed urban landscape that spreads across the image space is the first example of a detailed landscape view of the *Perishers* world, a dense and grimy streetscape.

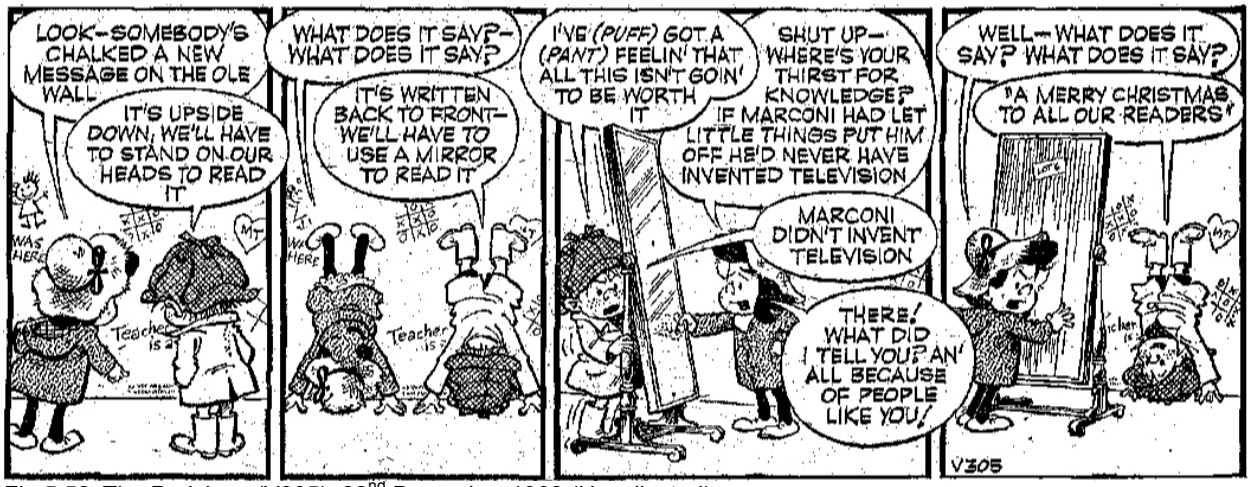


Fig 5.52 *The Perishers* (V305), 22nd December 1962 (Uncollected)

This is another of the occasions where the children acknowledge their existence as characters in a cartoon strip. The punchline is Wellington standing on his head to read the message "A Merry Christmas to all our readers." Given Collins' proclivity for jokes, visual puns and technical experimentation it is reasonable to assume the original artwork does have a fully legible mirror-written text. The pun is that it has to be seen 'in the mirror', as in 'The Mirror' newspaper.

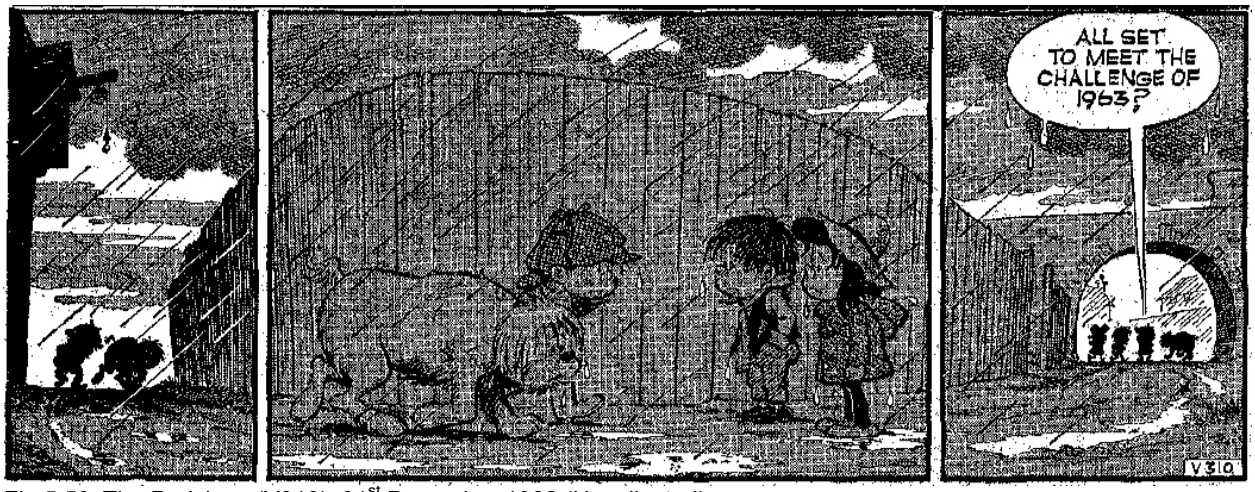


Fig 5.53 *The Perishers* (V310), 31st December 1962 (Uncollected)

The New Year in *The Perishers* is often a downbeat, lugubrious affair, with the prospect of returning to school and most of winter still to come. Here the characters are clearly meeting at a prearranged point. Maisie and Marlon have been standing in the rain waiting for Old Boot and Wellington, whose dolorously rhetorical query 'All set to meet the challenge of 1963?' functions as a portentous punchline, the heavy rain dripping even from the speech balloon.

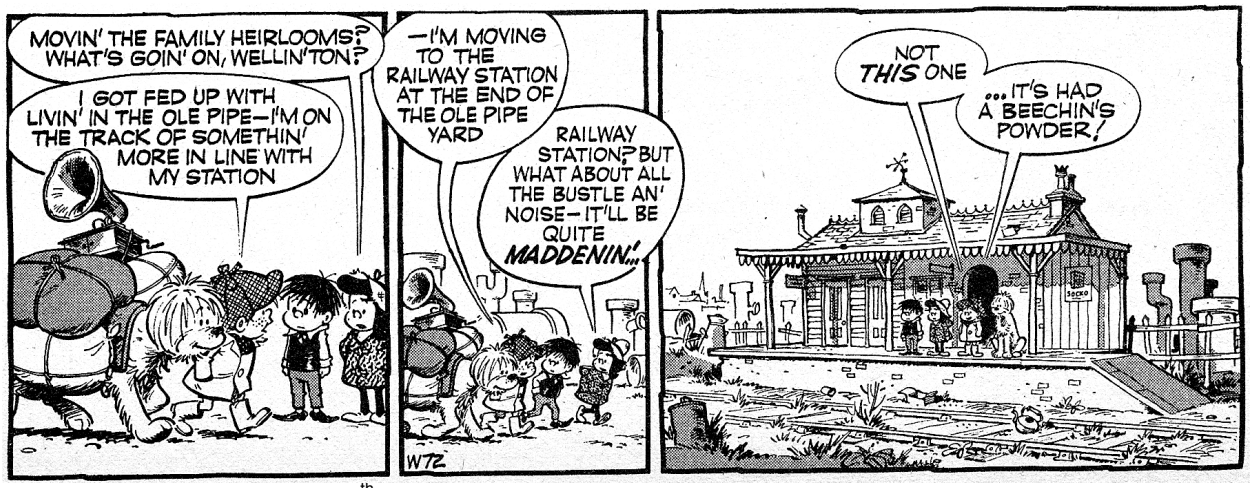


Fig 5.54 *The Perishers* (W72), 25th March 1963

In 1963 Wellington and Boot left their pipeyard home to move into a deserted railway station which, similarly to the Dodd family move to Shepperton in 1960, would be home for almost the next 50 years. Wellington's punchline that the station has 'had a Beechin's Powder!' refers to the closure of branch lines on the recommendations of Lord Beeching's 1963 Railways Report. Dodd wrote of Wellington's relocation:

> When Dr. Beeching was closing railway lines and stations in an attempt to make the railways work, Wellington took advantage of the situation and claimed squatters' rights. It's a small station which used to be in the country (Isambard Kingdom Brunel once used the toilet before somebody stole the seat) until the city edged out to nibble at its edges. Although, to the untrained eye, Wellington's station seems to be made

> of brick, stone and timber, it is in reality manufactured from elastic, as it expands and contracts to meet the requirements of the strip of the day.[27]

The description of the city nibbling at the edges of the country is an apt description of the commuter belt that was Dodd's Shepperton home. He also acknowledges the mutability of the new space for comedic and narrative purposes. Although it begins as a spartan space, by the time Collins retires from the strip it has acquired a complete itinerary of childhood accoutrements.

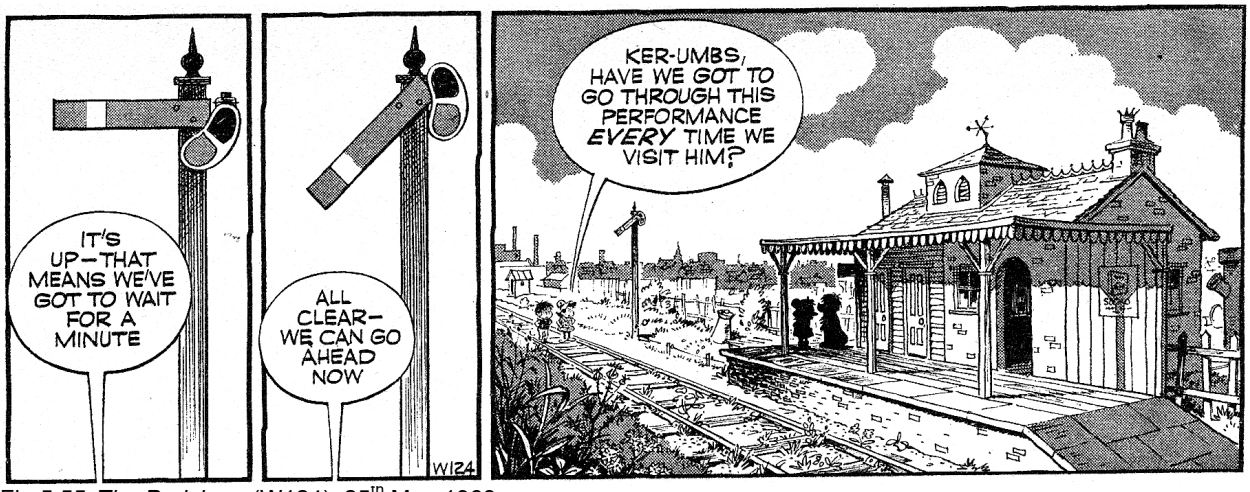


Fig 5.55 *The Perishers* (W124), 25th May 1963

The railway station, together with its rear elevation, garden and surrounding wasteland becomes a convincingly detailed environment as the 'Classic Stage' develops. In this strip the first panel shows a British semaphore railway signal set at 'stop' indicating that any incoming train should wait. The second panel shows the signal at its 'down' position indicating that the train can now pass through the station. The drawing is detailed penwork and ink wash, the wooden pole particularly finely inked with consistent lines and hatching delineating the texture. The final panel reveals Marlon and Maisie waiting on an overgrown railway track while Wellington and Boot wait in the shadow of the platform in formal poses as if grandly anticipating an official visit.

[27] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 175.

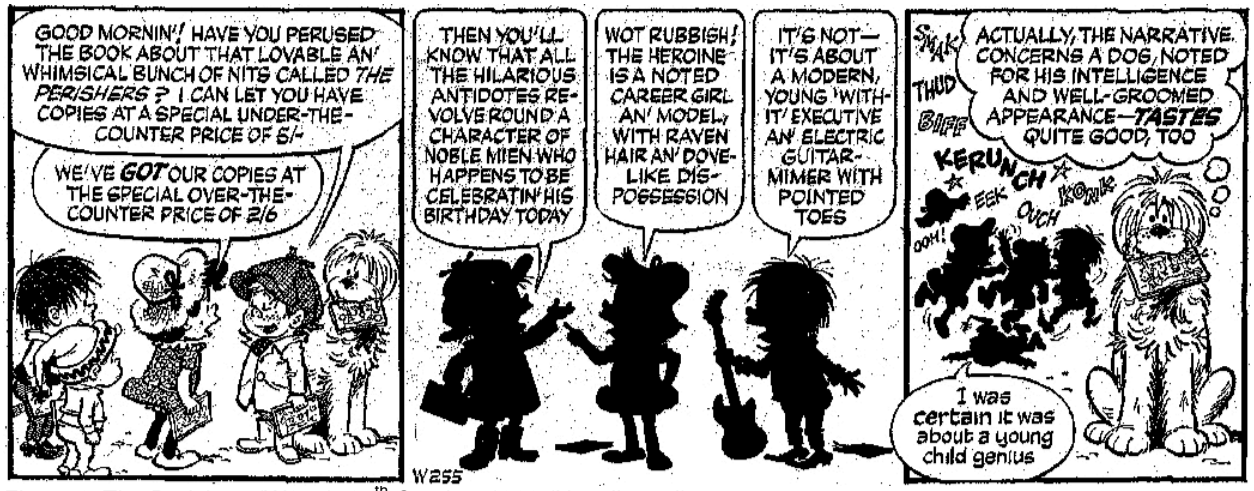


Fig 5.56 *The Perishers* (W255), 25th October 1963 (Uncollected)

In October 1963 the first *Perishers* book collection was published, reprinting a selection of strips from the first four years and prompting another strip addressing the fact that the children are actually cartoon strip characters. Wellington offers the cast a copy of the book collection 'at a special under-the-counter price of 5/-', which as Maisie corrects is twice the 'special over-the-counter price of 2/6'. The children compete to be the book's main focus with potted, self-aggrandising character portraits, such as Maisie's claim to be 'a noted career girl an' model with raven hair an' dove-like disposition'. Their idealised self-images are inevitably undercut by deterioration into cartoon brawl.

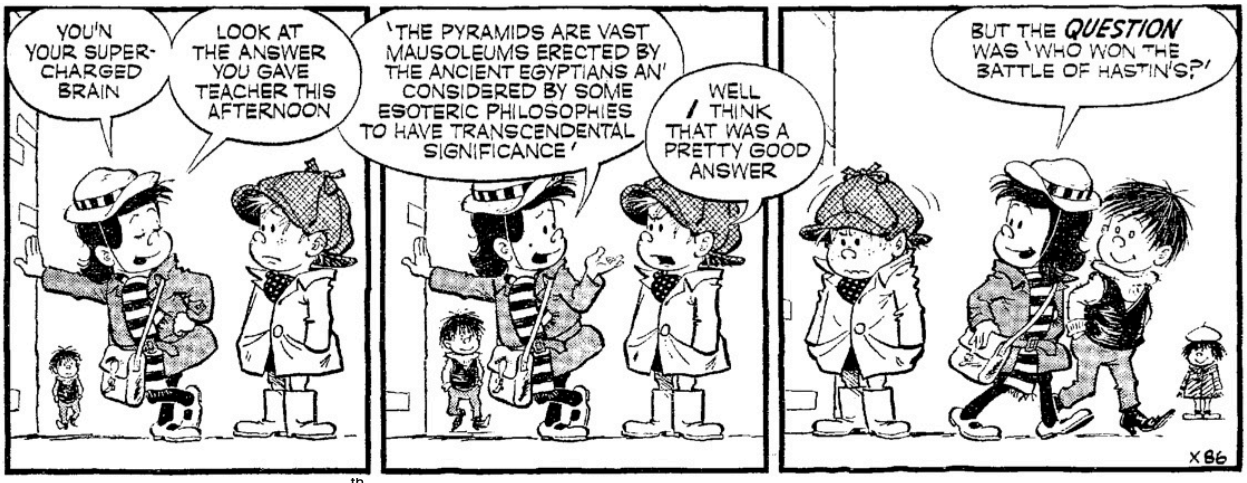


Fig 5.57 *The Perishers* (X86), 10th April 1964

This strip is formally notable for a number of reasons. Firstly, Maisie's relaxed stance and body language place her at the top of the social engagement tree, as she puts Wellington down with the reflexively rhetorical dismissal 'You'n your super-charged brain. Look at the answer you gave Teacher this afternoon.' Peter Ackroyd has noted that

> If we are to denote a London style … it suggests aggression, and a measure of latent cynicism, which have never been absent from the city; it also reveals the need to impress, in a milieu where everyone and everything competes to demand attention.[28]

However, the most intriguing aspect of the strip is the figure in the background of the final panel that mirrors the scale and position of the Marlon figure from the first panel. Never are unknown children pictured in this way in the strip. When I had guessed that this must be Collins' daughter Dr Judy Collins and showed the strip to her, she confirmed she had told me that it was a drawing of her as a child 'Yes, because I had a coat and a beret like that. Oh, how delightful! Yes, absolutely. I looked exactly like that.'[29] When I noted its unique nature within the strip's history Dr Collins said that 'they probably they told him not to do it again.'[30]

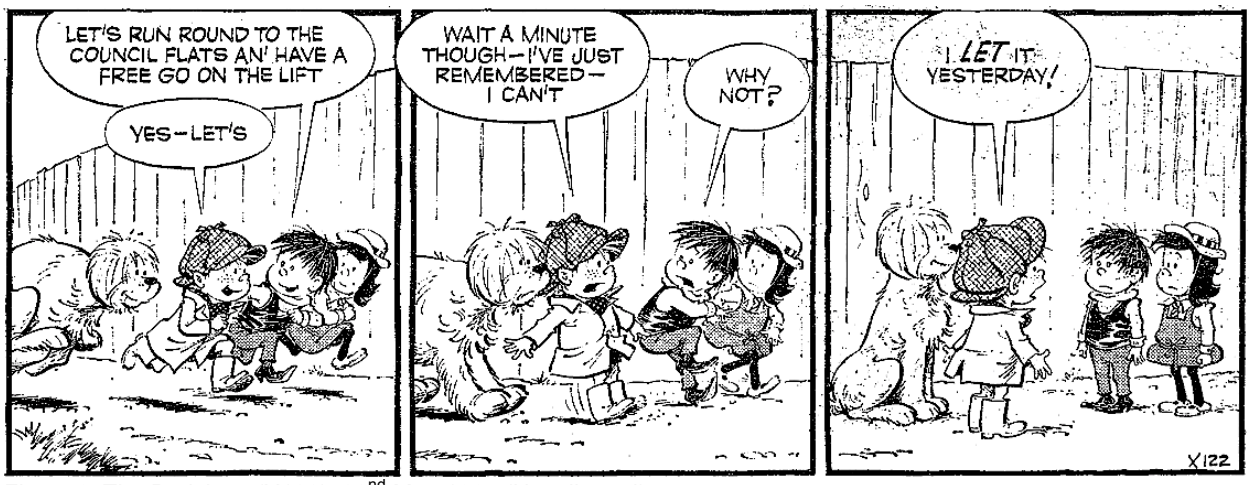


Fig 5.58 *The Perishers* (X122), 22nd May 1964 (Uncollected)

In this strip the children intend to 'run round to the council flats an' have a free go on the lift.' The strip takes place after the 1963 Profumo Affair, when it was revealed that Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies lived in one of slumlord Peter Rachman's properties, and before the passing of the 1965 Rent Act addressing the security of tenants. It was at this point 'Rachmanism' entered the popular vocabulary. As well as squatting rent-free, Wellington's announcement regarding the lift that 'I *let* it yesterday!' displays his topical business side-line in illegal subletting of public property.

[28] Ackroyd, *London – A Biography*, p. 307.
[29] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012.
[30] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012.

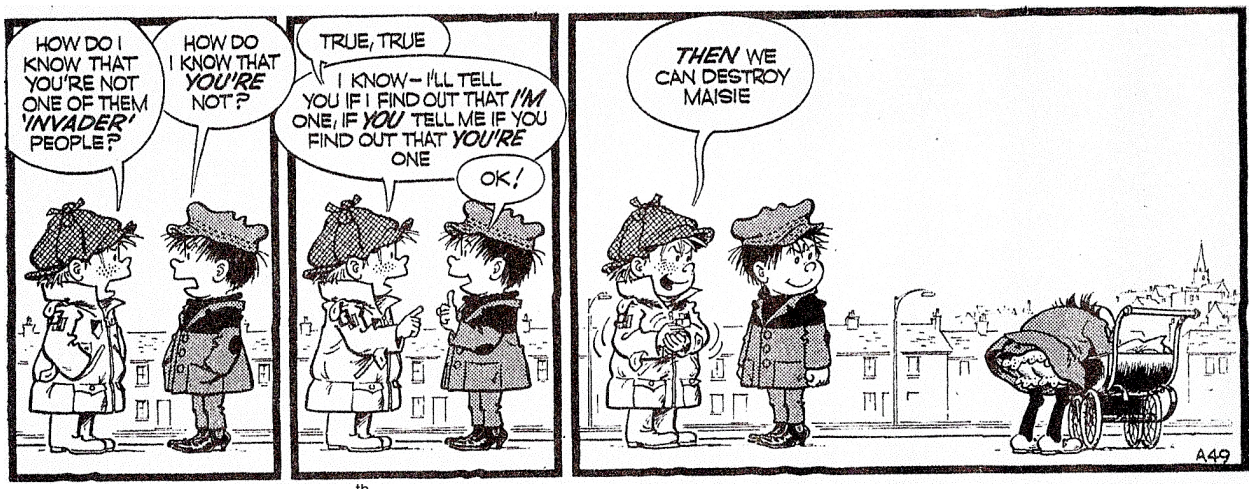


Fig 5.59 *The Perishers* (A49), 27th February 1967

The strip often references television, possibly gleaned from Dodd's own childrens' viewing such as 'Noddy', 'Dr Who', 'The Fugitive' and here the 1967 American series 'The Invaders' which told the story of a secret global invasion by extra-terrestrials in human disguise. Wellington and Marlon's agreement relies on them establishing that if they are both alien invaders they will gang together to 'destroy Maisie'. The most notable and slightly queasy aspect of the strip is Maisie's knickers-revealing vulnerability as she tends to her doll in the pram, oblivious to the murder plot.

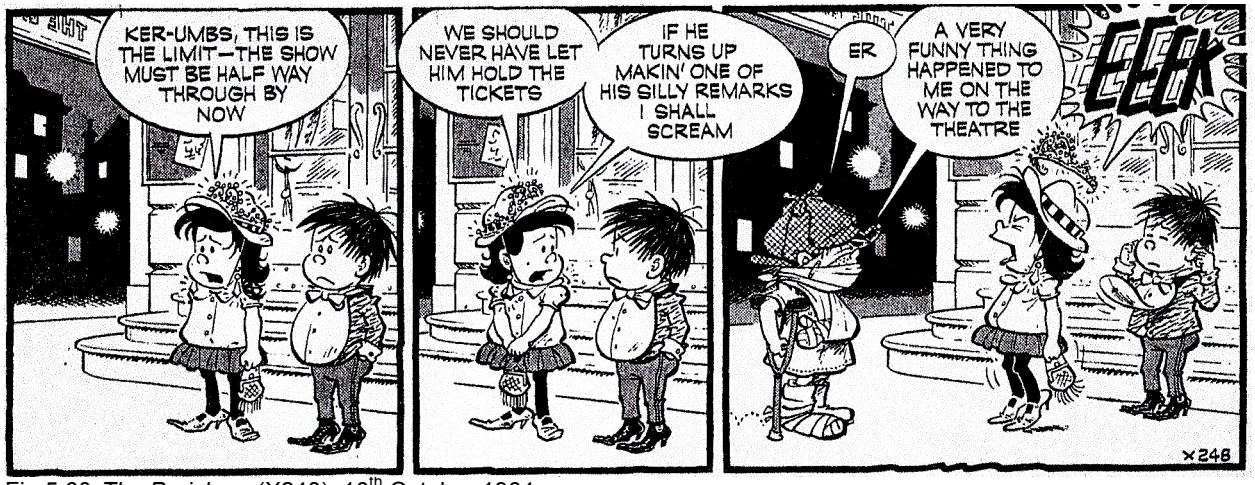


Fig 5.60 *The Perishers* (X248), 16th October 1964

The setting for this strip is unique within the history of *The Perishers*. Maisie and Marlon are waiting outside a theatre dressed in a child's approximation of formal evening dress. Marlon sports a cardboard shirtfront and bow-tie and Maisie a tiara, white shoes and a fringed clutchbag. Wellington's simultaneous appearance and punchline is pure music-hall. Immediately following Maisie's declaration that if Wellington 'turns up makin' one of his silly remarks I shall scream' he hobbles into view swathed in bandages and on crutches, his hopping delineated by a small arc of bouncing dots to announce that 'a very funny thing

happened to me on the way to the theatre.' Maisie duly screams, curling Marlon's shirtfront with the deafening force. There is no explanation given for Wellington's predicament and it remains a mystery.

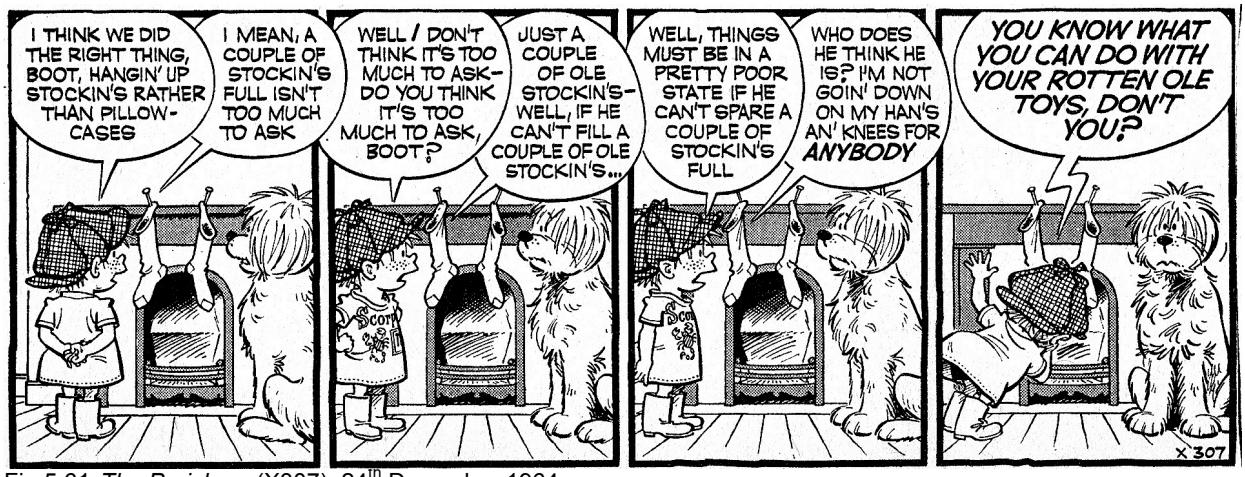


Fig 5.61 *The Perishers* (X307), 24th December 1964

A capsule example of Wellington's thought process, arguably both childishly self-justifying and put-upon, founded in optimism but afraid of failure. His monologue begins with the rhetorical 'I think we did the right thing … hangin' up stockings rather than pillow-cases,' the rationale developing with 'Well *I* don't think it's too much to ask', descending to bargaining, curdling into affrontery and culminating with an angry outburst. This kind of 'turn' is reminiscent of comic writing for film and television of the period as articulated in the thwarted aspirations of such characters as Tony Hancock, Albert Steptoe and the Likely Lads.

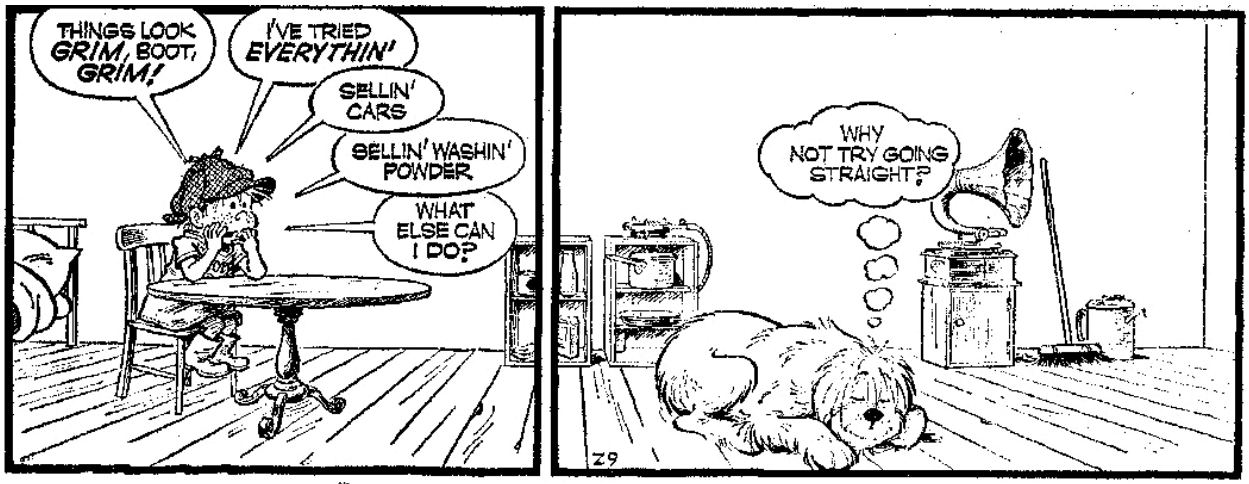


Fig 5.62 *The Perishers* (Z9), 11th January 1966 (Uncollected)

Wellington survives by a series of misguided business enterprises, or scams, which never lead to any real profit. This precarious subsistence is expressed in his anxious rhetoric in the first frame, where he is crowded by a list of his admitted failed scams. The single panel border

divides the image in two and gives the comedic temporal pause before Boot's response. Without this crucial rupture Boot's thought balloon would run straight on in the reader's mind from Wellington's pleading 'What else can I do?'. Physically Wellington is enclosed within his anxious cluster of speech balloons, while around Boot is the empty space of dozing contentment.

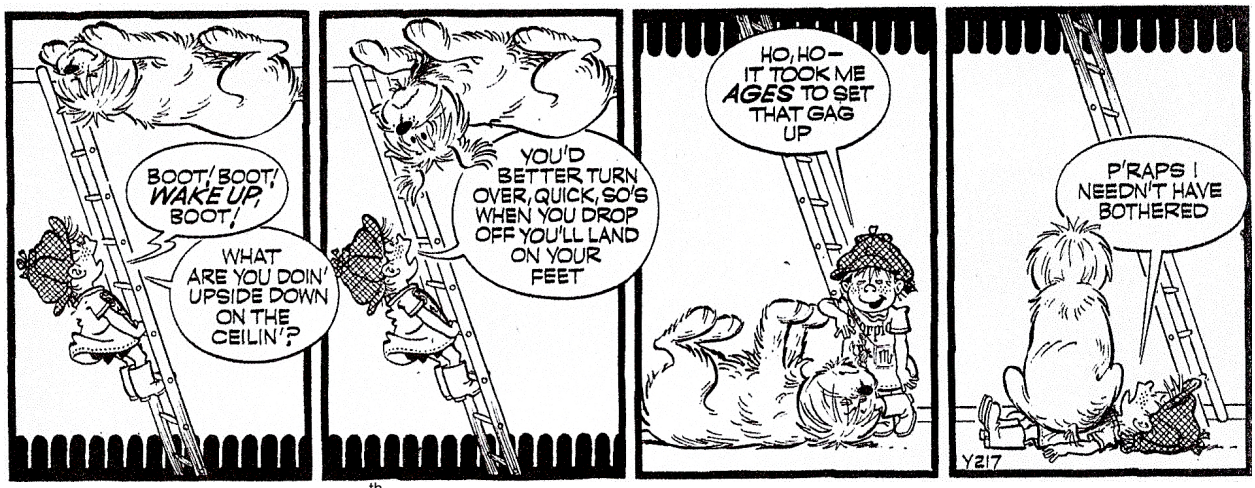


Fig 5.63 *The Perishers* (Y217), 11th September 1965

There are certain strips that exhibit an element of formal play. In this example the first two panels are presented upside-down, with Wellington actually hanging off the ladder facing the ground to convince a dozing Boot he has fallen asleep on the ceiling. As Boot believes Wellington, he 'falls' and finds himself upside down on the ground. In the reading of the strip a mental adjustment is necessary to reorientate the reality of the scene.



Fig 5.64 *The Perishers* (X160), 6th July 1964

The first of two secondary characters introduced in the 'Classic Stage' represents one of the strip's arguments for Carl Jung's theory of nominative determinism, the notion that a person's name determines their personal outlook and career choice. The blond, bespectacled boy's

name is Fiscal Yere, homophonic for 'fiscal year', and his conversation and behaviour are consistently and solely driven by monetary concern. In *The Perishers* he is the 'rich kid,' and he expects the other characters to treat him accordingly as servants.

When Fiscal witheringly repeats the economic creed of the free market, Wellington counters with a rambling and unlikely account of his own birthright. The strip is representative of Wellington's flippant relationship towards hierarchies or power structures. Fiscal's elocution is clipped and pronounced, and his guileless query in the final panel is the gullible articulation of a rationalist's bewilderment.

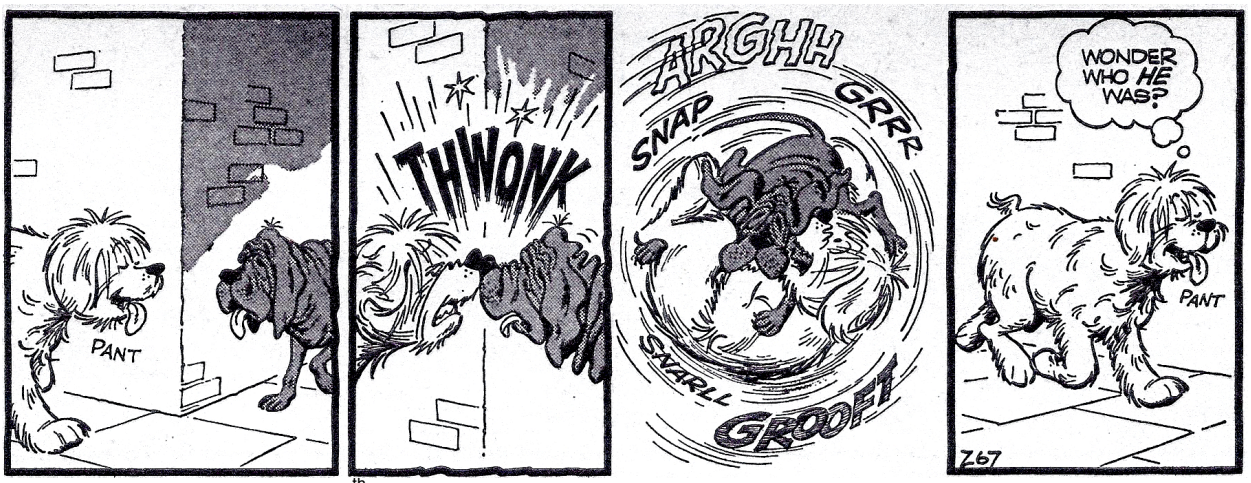


Fig 5.65 *The Perishers* (Z67), 19th March 1966

The other significant character of the 'Classic Stage' is BH Calcutta (Failed), the dog who would become a long-running comic foil for Boot. Dodd recounted the initial inspiration for this inaugural strip:

> It happened one fine day as my dog and I sallied forth for a walk, a pint and a biscuit. The biscuit was for the dog - an arrowroot biscuit; they used to be as big a plate and cost one penny. My local has stopped selling them, so when I take the dog for a walk these days I also have to take a packet of biscuits. Anyway, off we went and as we came through the gateway on to the road we met a bloodhound, nose to nose. Or one pair of knees-and-nose to nose. A certain amount of excited shouting and leaping about ensued, and, just as in the end frame above, we were left wondering who the bloodhound was. I never did find out, but as far as the strip was concerned it was the first appearance of B.H. (Calcutta) Failed - a bloodhound who would have been advised to follow another trade in view of his complete inability to smell.[31]

[31] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus 2*, p. 170.

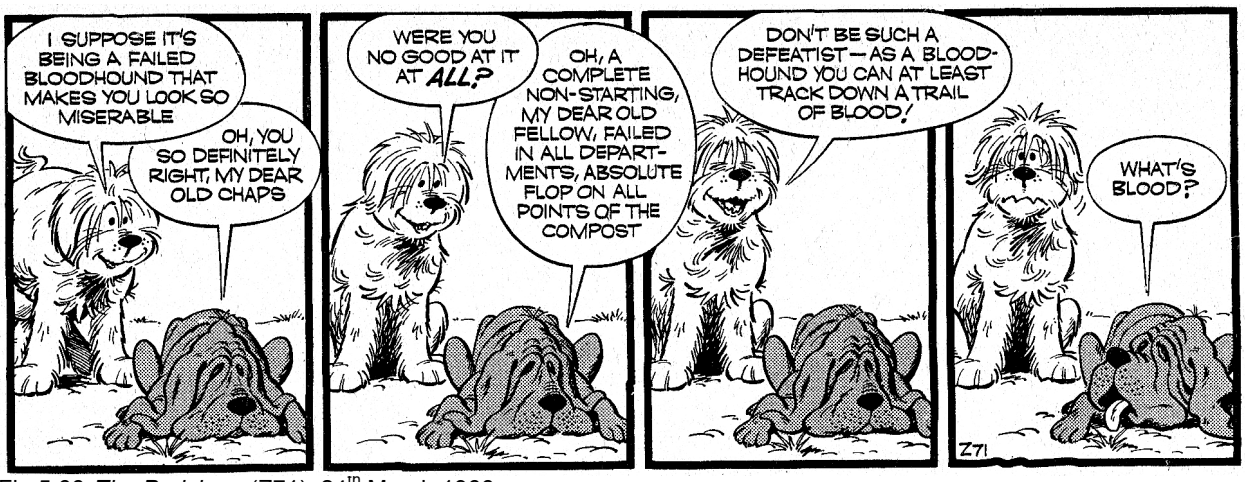


Fig 5.66 *The Perishers* (Z71), 24th March 1966

With 'BH' standing for Bloodhound and 'Calcutta (Failed)' denoting his choice of higher education establishment and low degree classification, BH's formal speech patterns locate him as Indian Asian. His appearance in 1966 overlapped with an increase in bellicose political language from the right, particularly from Enoch Powell, around continuing immigration into Britain from the Commonwealth. BH is fundamentally benign, polite and good-natured, but slightly misses the point in conversation and cultural attitudes. This corresponds with the lightly clichéd and patronising interpretation of the Indian temperament of the times, particularly in other 'blackface' representations like Peter Sellers' characters in films 'The Millionairess' and 'The Party' which continued into the 1970s with TV comedies 'Curry & Chips' (1969) and 'It Ain't Half Hot, Mum' (1974-1981). A passive recipient of Boot's sardonic wit, BH's ongoing existential crisis is his lack of a sense of smell. However, as well as tormenting the bloodhound by trying to train him with smoked kippers and the like, Boot also sometimes takes pity on and supports BH when he 'reads' the scents of the landscape to inform BH of what he is missing.



Fig 5.67 *The Perishers* (Y85), 9th April 1965

This strip demonstrates Dodd's borrowing of arcane turns-of-phrase from other media. The reference to 'a sock full spaghetti tied up ugly' quotes from the 1957 *Goon Show* radio episode 'Ill Met by Goonlight' where Peter Sellers' character Major Bloodnok states:

> Each commando, oohhoo, is issued with an army sock full of lukewarm spaghetti, you see, then when he meets a Hun full-face, it's Whoosh-putt-nuk-Mcnool! Right in the square-head's mush. And by the time the Jerries have scraped it off, it's too late! The pubs are all shut, lad!'[32]

Possibly such a strange expression found more common usage but this is the only traceable reference.

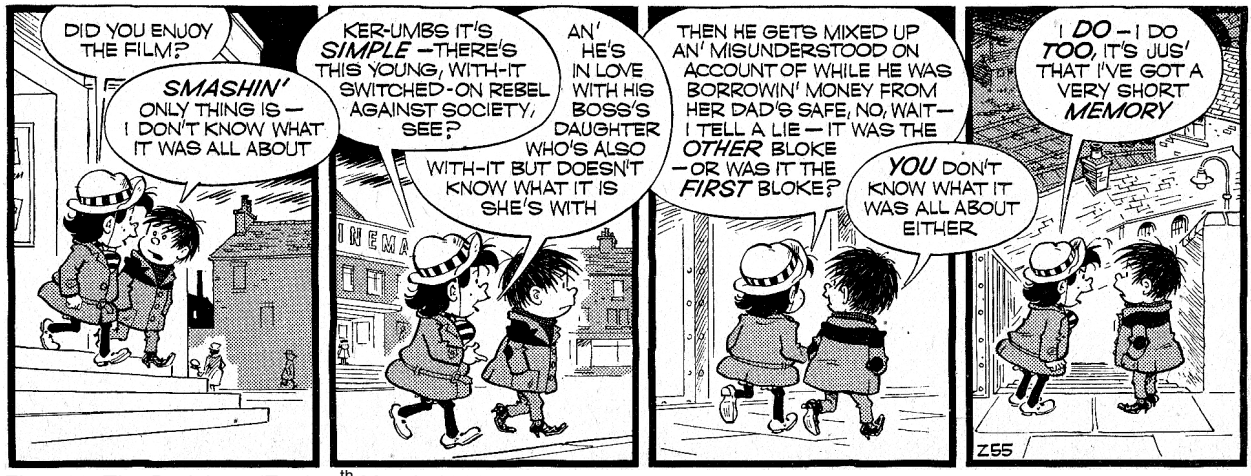


Fig 5.68 *The Perishers* (Z55), 5th March 1966

Occasionally Maisie and Marlon go on dates, and after this visit to the cinema Maisie attempts to explain the plot of the film they have just seen. What is unusual in this sequence is the atmosphere of leaving a cinema in early evening and still being in the film. That sense is strongly evoked through detail, tone and pacing. The mothers walking with young children, homebound office workers, a little girl waiting at the steps of the cinema, and distant glowing shop lights are deeply evocative of a quintessential childhood sensation.

[32] http://www.thegoonshow.net/scripts_show.asp?title=s07e23_ill_met_by_goonlight (Accessed 21 October 2015).

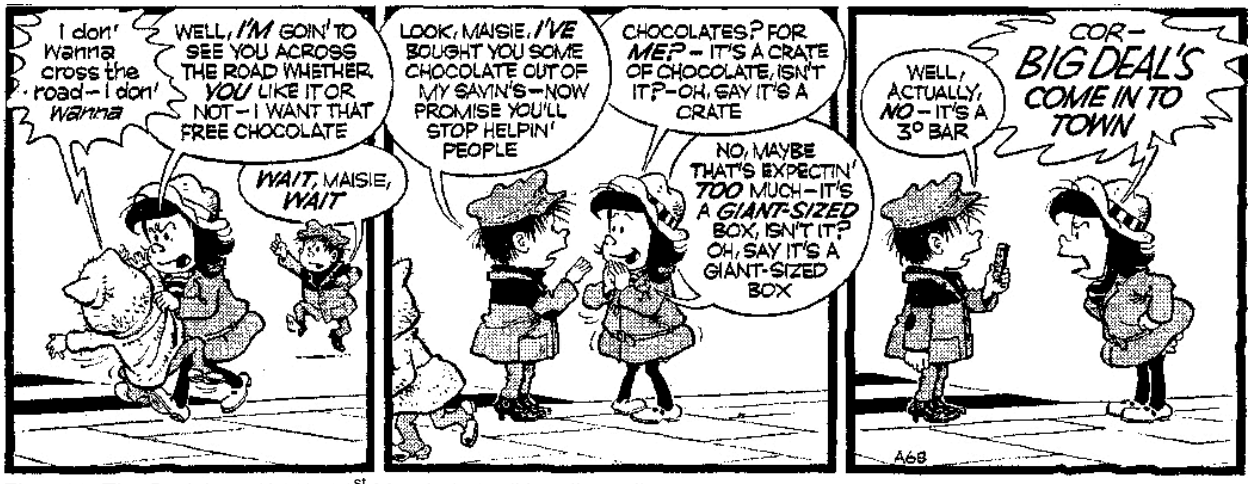


Fig 5.69 *The Perishers* (A68), 21st March 1967 (Uncollected)

This strip is an explosive example of Maisie's use of language in the strip to signify her capricious moods. Each panel has a different emotional tone and pace. Authoritarian and bullying with Grumpling, excitedly knock-kneed and flattered when Marlon tries to placate her with chocolate, and then sneeringly sarcastic when offered the small, single candy bar.

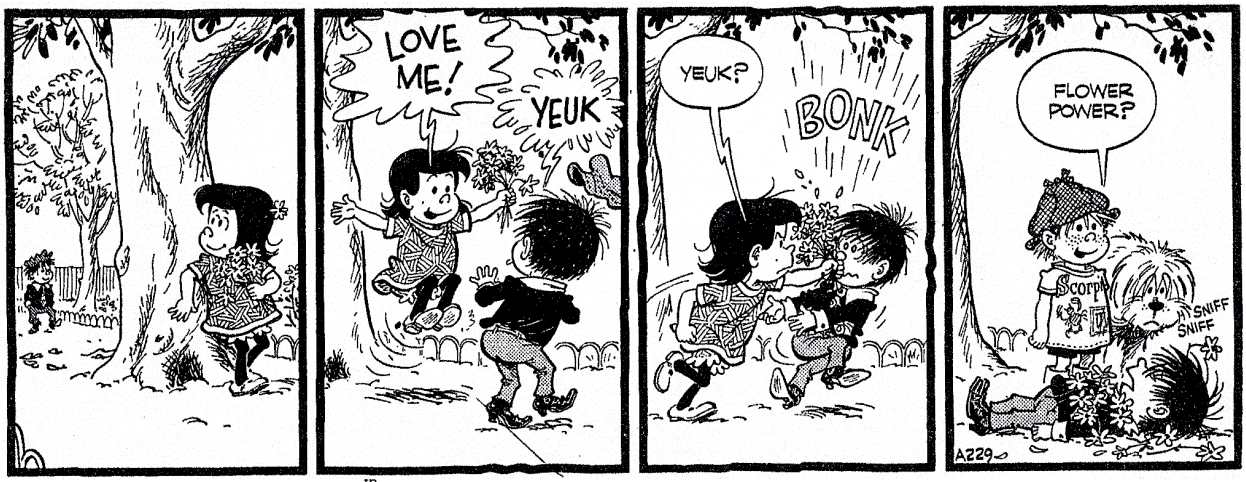


Fig 5.70 *The Perishers* (A229), 26th September 1967

Sometimes Maisie will demonstrate her love for Marlon by ambushing him with gifts; this rarely works in her favour. The striking aspect of this strip is the sheer pace of it; the speed of the awaiting, encounter, assault and aftermath. The four panels are of precisely equal width which emphasizes the visual rhythm of the strip. Marlon's spontaneous revulsion and Maisie's offended response turn the emotional atmosphere immediately. Wellington's 'Flower Power?' query ironically quotes the Allen Ginsberg-created anti-violence campaign.

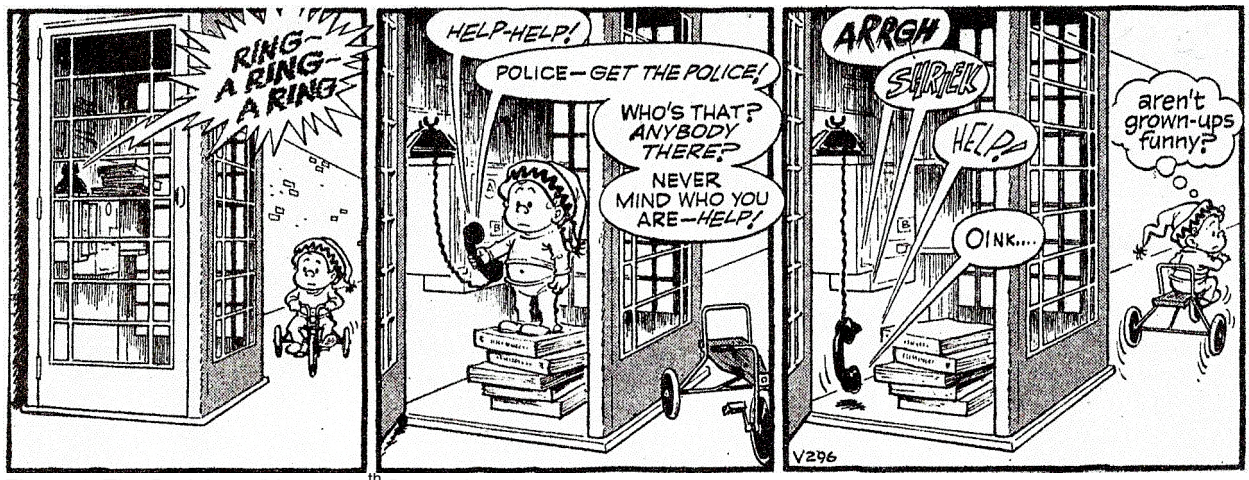


Fig 5.71 *The Perishers* (V296), 12th December 1962

As he grows older through the 'Classic Stage' Baby Grumpling obtains a tricycle and a certain amount of independence. On his travels he begins to encounter the adult world. In this strip he answers the ringing telephone in a phone box. His bewildered and vacant stance in the central panel is a portrait of pure childhood confusion, bellybutton exposed and arms drooped in semi-conscious bewilderment as a murder apparently takes place on the other end of the line. The fact that Grumpling has stacked up all the telephone directories suggests the phone was ringing a long time between the first two panels until he could finally reach the receiver. A cartoonish style would have lessened the comedic impact; the realistic depiction of the shadowy phone box interior accentuates the unfolding drama on the other end of the phone.

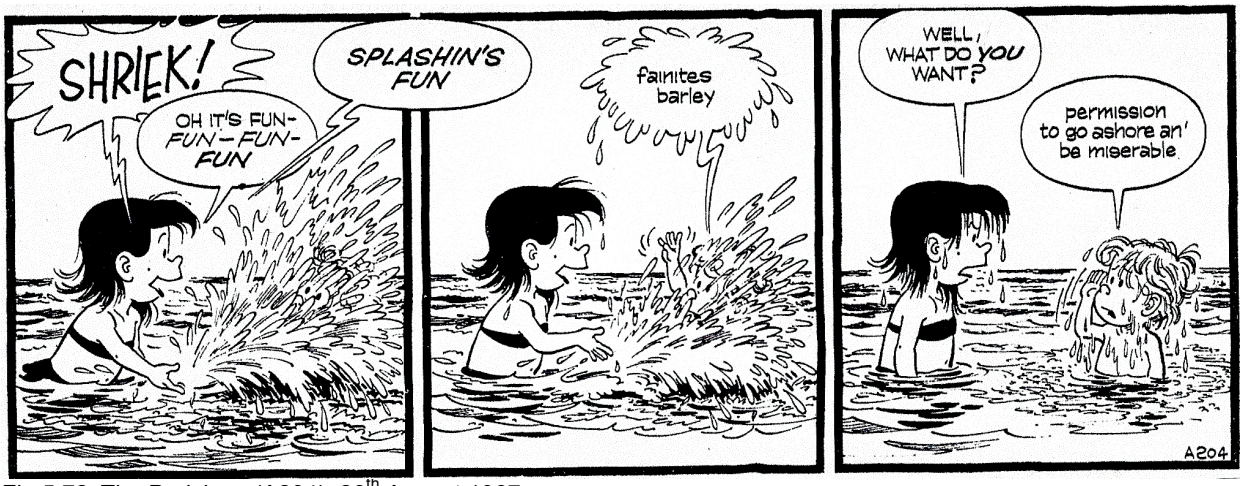


Fig 5.72 *The Perishers* (A204), 28th August 1967

Maisie is torrentially splashing Grumpling as an established part of the seaside childhood holiday experience. His drowning cry of 'fainites barley' is an example of playground 'truce terms.' Together with 'pax' or 'crosses', 'fainites' or ('fains' for short) was used by children as a mutually accepted request for a cessation of whatever game or conflict was taking place. Childrens' folklorists Iona and Peter Opie considered such a term 'the most important word in a

schoolchild's vocabulary and one for which there was no adult equivalent.'[33] Maisie's response of 'Well, what do *you* want?' suggests only grudging acknowledgement of Grumpling's significance in the supposedly mutual play.



Fig 5.73 *The Perishers* (C122), 24th May 1969 (Uncollected)

This was the year after the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign had begun demonstrating outside the American Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square. Maisie's recital of the childrens' nursery rhyme 'Boys and Girls Come out to Play,' with its reference to 'join your playfellows in the street' is interpreted by Grumpling as her quoting anti-war activist Tariq Ali's call to public dissent.

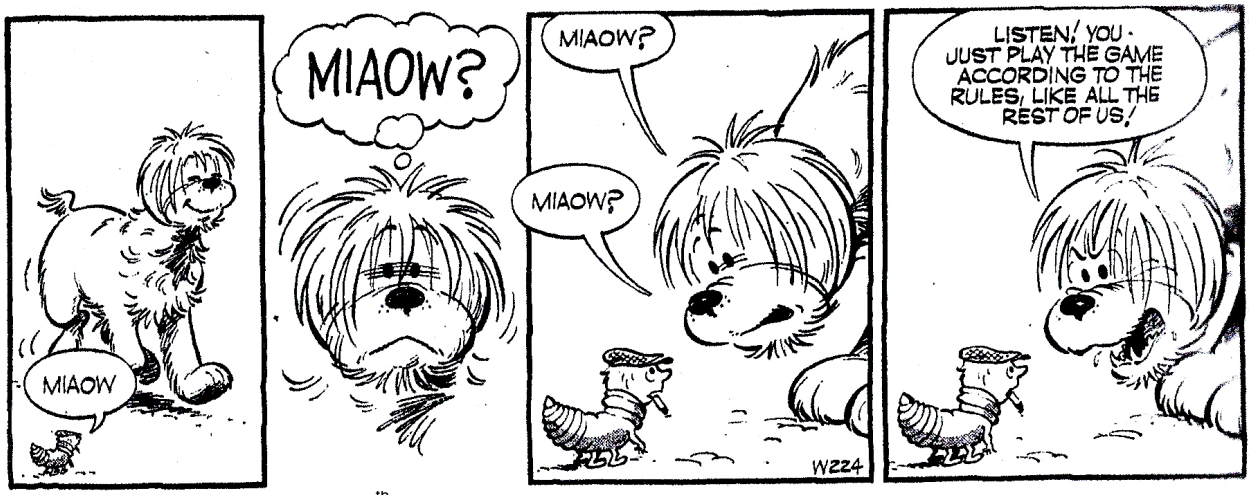


Fig 5.74 *The Perishers* (W224), 19th September 1963

This strip reintroduces the visually revised and streamlined 'Rodney' caterpillar, of who Dodd wrote:

[33] Opie & Opie, *The Lore & Language of Schoolchildren*, p. 141.

> This is the first appearance of the delinquent caterpillar who dropped out because he stunted his growth through smoking and never made it to butterfly. He and Fred, the beetle, frequently form an uneasy alliance in their attempts to take over the strip, but the partnership is subject to stress because of ideological differences. Fred is an old-fashioned anti-royalist, but the caterpillar, being a caterpillar, is naturally a Miaowist.[34]

The pun on *cat*-erpillar and *Miaow*-ist is groaningly forced, but demonstrates the degree of wordplay particular to these insect narratives.

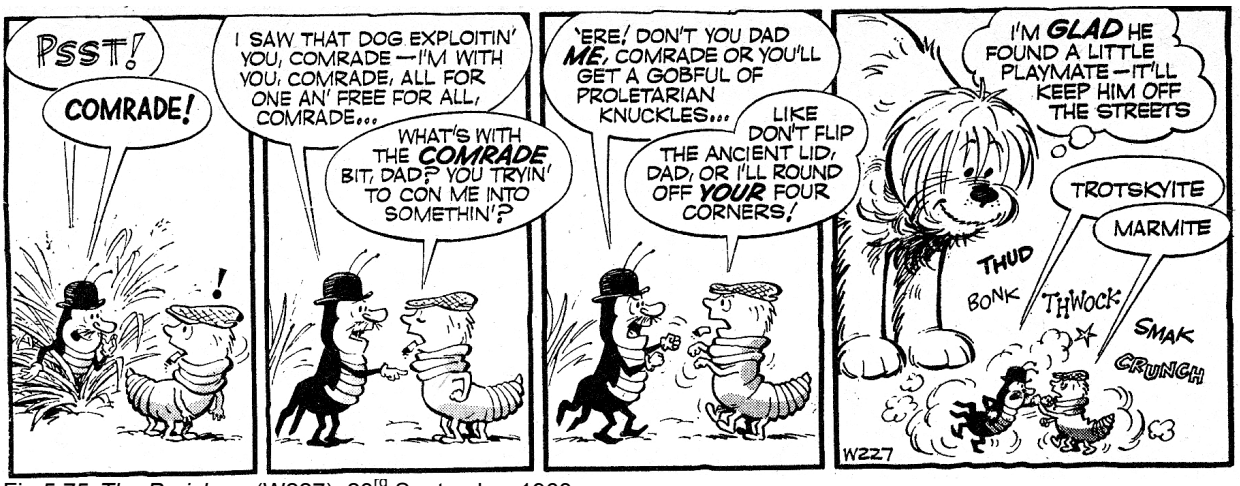


Fig 5.75 *The Perishers* (W227), 23rd September 1963

Once Fred Beetle and the caterpillar are established as a partnership they conform to the comic strip mould of the 'tramp duo' begun with English cartoonist Tom Browne's *Weary Willie & Tired Tim* and most famously adapted by Laurel & Hardy. Fred's social status is visually codified as oscillating between 'little Hitler union organiser', 'gentleman-of-the-road' and 'down-at-heel toff' and the caterpillar as 'officer's batman' or 'shiftless prole' familiar from satirical 1950s films like 'I'm Alright, Jack.'

The insect strips often culminate in the kind of fisticuffs common to cartoons and silent films, where the combatants dance around each other, fists raised and demonstrating fancy footwork before descending into an arms-swinging brawl interspersed with, in the case of Fred and the caterpillar, hurled epithets such as 'Trotskyite', 'Termite' and 'Marmite'.

[34] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 198.

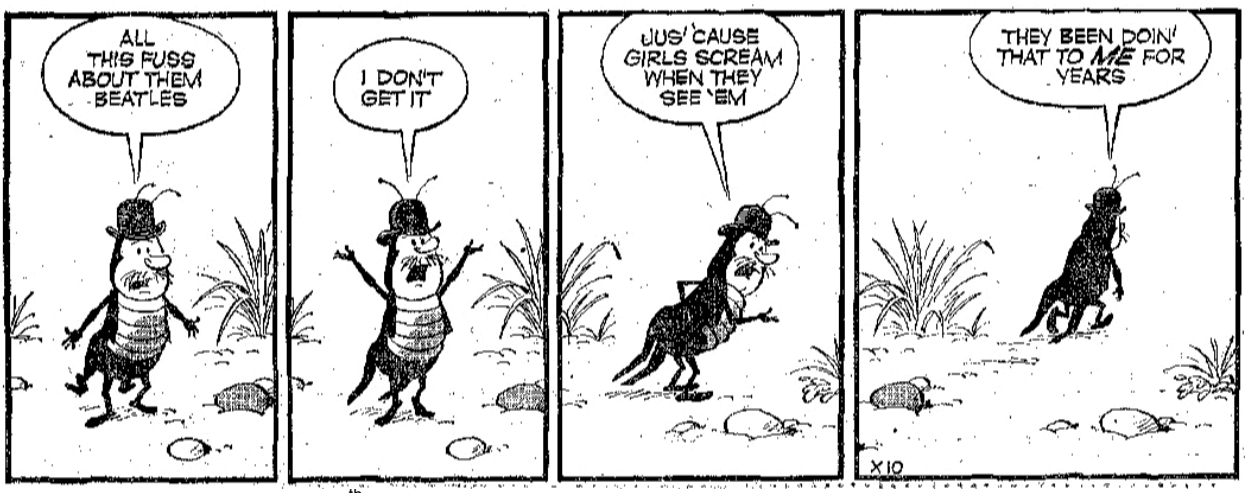


Fig 5.76 *The Perishers* (X10), 11th January 1964 (Uncollected)

In 1964 Fred Beetle turns to address the reader directly in the manner of either a music hall comedian or the TV *vox pop* – the man-on-the-street asked for a response to a topical subject. Formally the pacing is unusual; between the second and third panels Fred has walked a little way away from us, then stopped to elaborate his point over his shoulder to 'us' before dejectedly walking away. Of note is the visual consistency of the landscape; Collins has placed the pebbles and clumps of grass at precisely the same distances across the strip, to the extent that the dent in the earth above the strip reference 'X10' in the final panel corresponds to the small white pebble in the foreground of the first two panels. This visual verisimilitude is a feature of the strip common to both its urban, human-scale context and in these miniature settings.

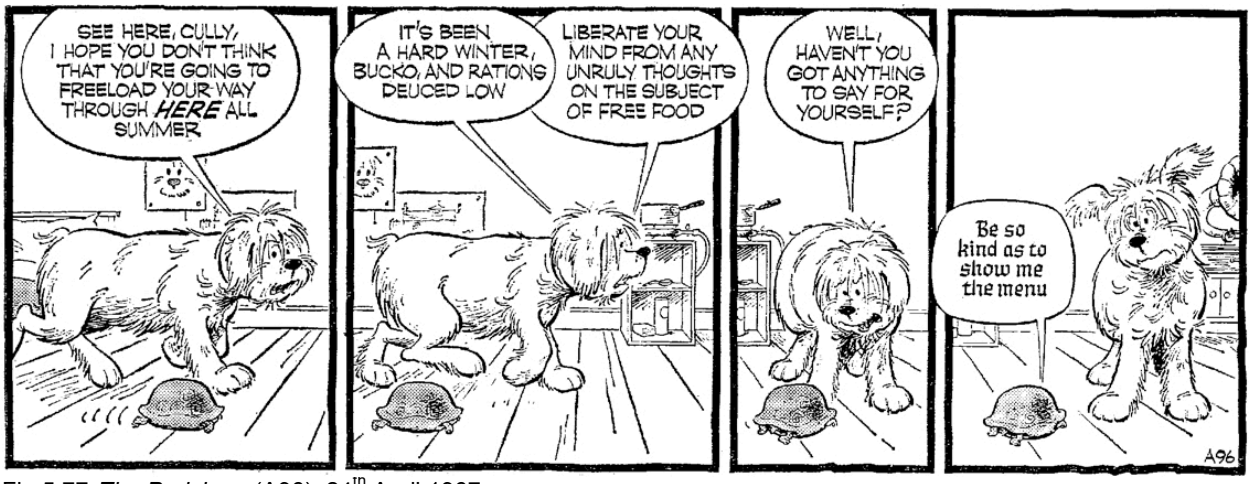


Fig 5.77 *The Perishers* (A96), 24th April 1967

In 1967 another character is introduced, one that sits (or crawls) halfway between the children and the other creatures. The tortoise had made a mute appearance the year before, but having returned, establishes itself as a silent irritant to Boot. Over the course of a couple of weeks he slowly reveals his identity. The above strip marks his first words spoken in his characteristic

Germanic font. His first sentence, 'Be so kind as to show me the menu', is evidently enunciated in the threateningly polite and clipped tones of the stock German officer from WWII films. He is revealed to be named Adolf Kilroy, whose origin Dodd later described:

> It occurred to me that a tortoise shell looked rather like the German *Stahlhelm*, as worn with matching accessories in two world wars. It was then that Adolf Kilroy really came into being-and I began to take personal revenge for being mucked about and badly frightened by another Adolf during my formative years.[35]

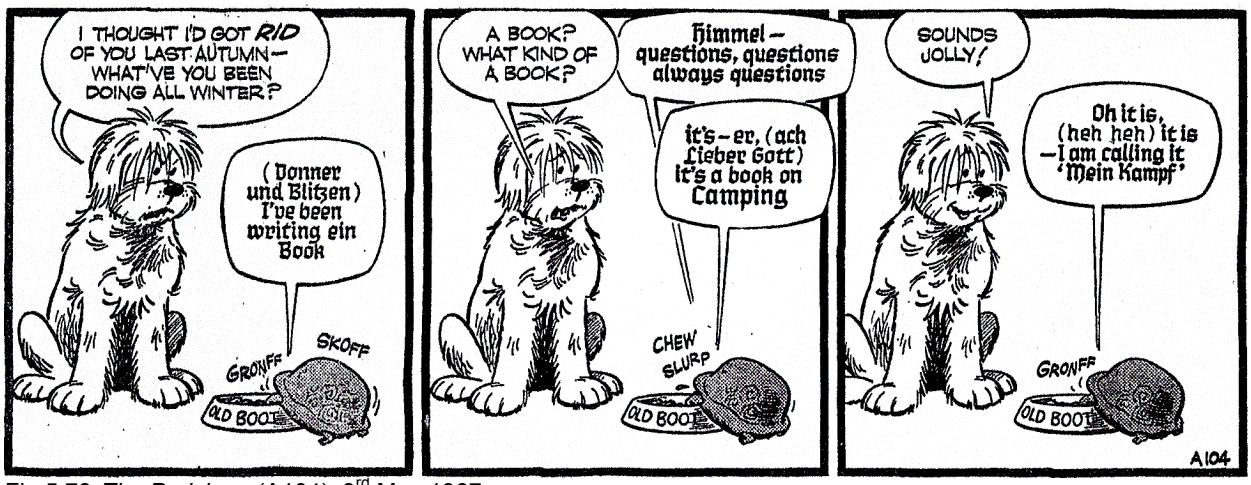


Fig 5.78 *The Perishers* (A104), 3rd May 1967

Kilroy outlines his backstory by degrees. While wolfing down Boot's dog food in this strip he is asked what he has been doing since the previous year. After some evasion he admits he has been writing 'a book on camping,' somewhat inevitably called 'Mein Kampf.'

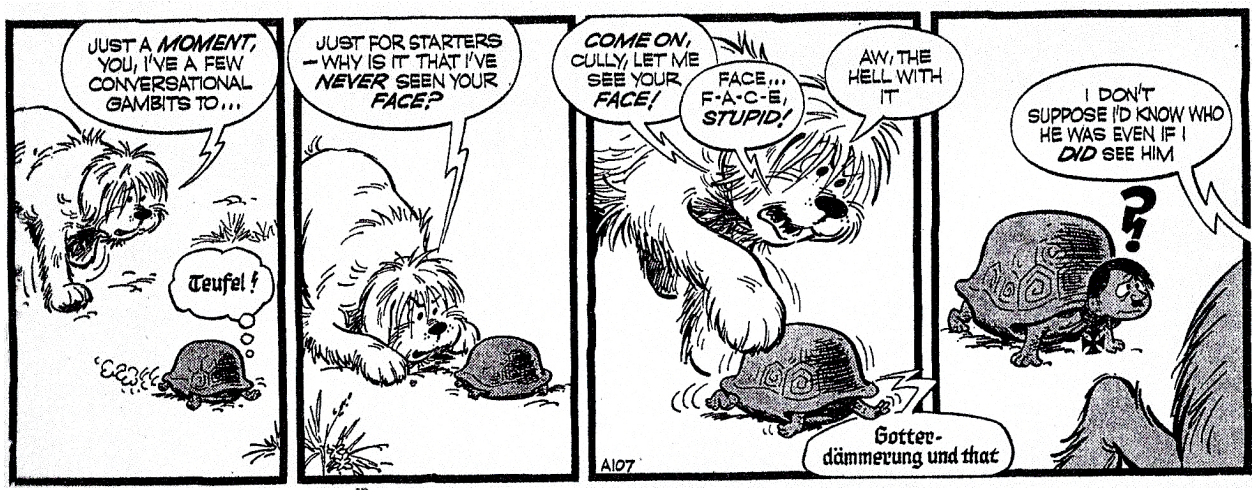


Fig 5.79 *The Perishers* (A107), 6th May 1967

[35] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus* 2, p. 139.

Finally Kilroy's face is revealed as being that of a tortoise-sized Hitler complete with side-swept hair and toothbrush moustache, complete with teutonically-styled question mark.

As well the children and insects, there are a number of visual and comedic themes that commence in the 'Classic Stage' and recur repeatedly. Along with birthdays, holidays and other seasonal events, the world of *The Perishers* has an element of 'folklore'. Numerous references are made to the May Queen Parade, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and mythology. There is one specific example where folk custom is examined, in the fictional celebration of the 'Annual Rhubarb Thrashing Festival of St Moribunds,' a rural tradition in the mould of Morris dancing, well-dressing or cheese-rolling. The theme developed to become something approaching reality, as Dodd recalled in 1974:

> In one of my weirder moments I decided to introduce a sport which was wildly unlikely and quite ridiculous. So I invented Rhubarb Thrashing - which breaks out in the strip about once a year. Wildly unlikely? Quite ridiculous? I should have known better. Somewhere in England (I forgot where, but I promise you, somewhere) people gather together every year for the purpose of thrashing rhubarb. And last summer, my birds came staggering home to roost. This subversive practice was indulged in at a school fete within an Olympic gold medallist's stones throw of my own home.[36]

As folklorist Bob Pegg has noted,

> We have inherited certain ideas about pagan ritual survivals, fertility ceremonies etc, and any bizarre activities which fit into this preconceived framework are fair game. For it is their strangeness, as much as anything, which has brought them to the attention of the folklorist in the first place. The customs, after all, came first and it was a growing awareness of their 'otherness', of the way they did not fit in with the increasingly urbanised society in which they took place that led people to try to study them scientifically and speculatively.[37]

[36] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus No. 2*, p. 206.
[37] Pegg, *Rites & Riots*, p. 16.

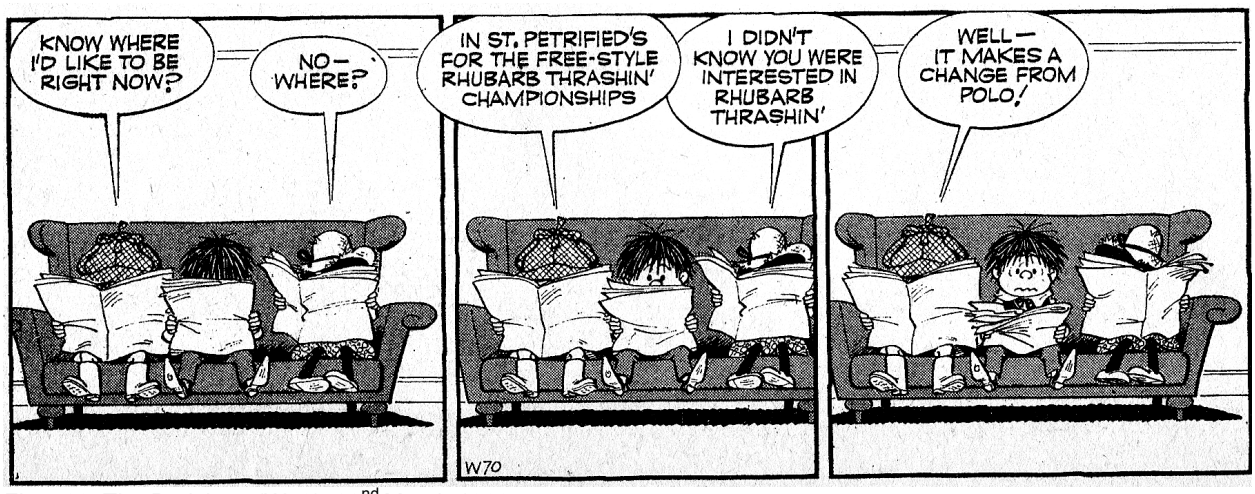


Fig 5.80 *The Perishers* (W70), 22nd March 1963

It is this 'otherness' that these strips exploit. Marlon represents the urbanite confronted with the 'strangeness' of rural custom. The earliest reference to 'Rhubarb Thrashing' is when Wellington diverts from his paper reading to declare he would like to be 'In St Petrified's for the free-style Rhubarb Thrashing Championships', and when Maisie expresses surprise at his interest he argues that 'it makes a change from polo!.' The reference to polo either implies knowledge not only of folk culture but also games played by the establishment as an indicator of Wellington's classlessness, or it is deliberately ironic given the lower social order of the characters. It also defines the difference between 'folk' custom as generally considered to be working-class culture and equestrian sports as 'posh'.

Where the 'Rhubarb Thrashing' running joke is predicated on the oddity and mutability of folk rites and rituals, so Marlon's invention of the 'inch thick ketchup sandwich' has its origin in American competitive eating contests. Ordinarily Marlon's inventions are of pre-existing objects such as the wheel or the whip; however, the sandwich is his original idea, although Dodd drew on wartime memory for the basis of Marlon's culinary creation:

> We used to scan the American photo-magazines for pictures of steaks and other forms of nourishment. I was sitting in a hole in the ground somewhere in Europe - or was it Africa? (Well, the fracas had got somewhat out of control and was happening all over the place) - when I chanced upon an item which said a craze had started among teenagers in the States for gulping down great masses of ketchup with their food, sometimes without bothering to include the food. This item went into the lumber room of my mind, jumbled up with other peculiar and almost totally useless bits of information; but I thought it might come in useful one day - and by the Lord Harry I was right.[38]

[38] Dodd, *The Perishers Omnibus*, p. 75.

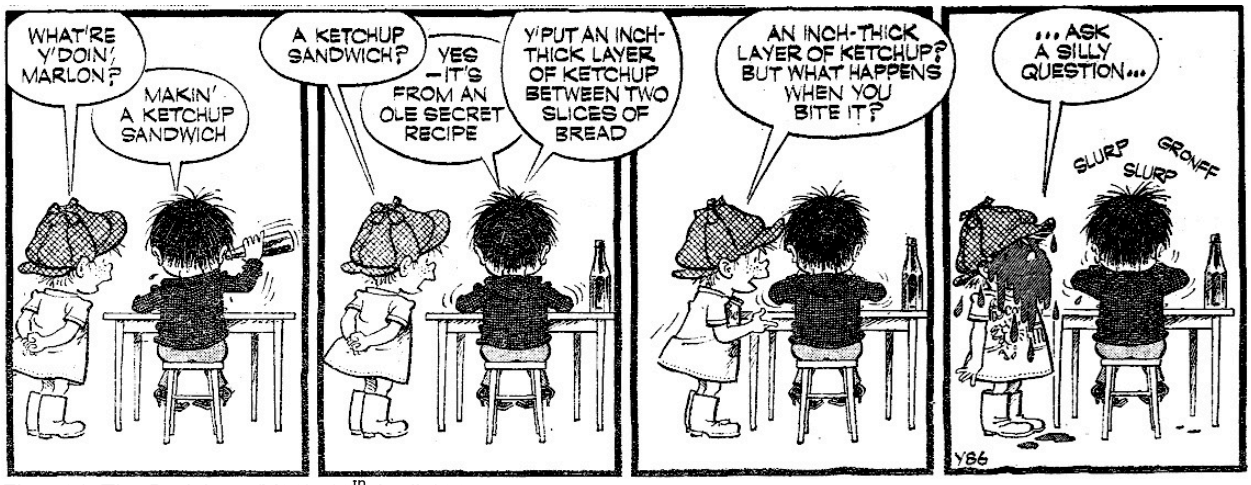


Fig 5.81 *The Perishers* (Y86), 10th April 1965

The sequence above marks the introduction and initial development of the recurring visual slapstick device through a number of stages. The structure of each strip is essentially the same every time. To begin with the nature of the sandwich is introduced, discussed and reconsidered, and then the slapstick payoff has Marlon's interlocutor coated in ketchup. The visual soiling of the person opposite him suggests that the filling is a metaphor for social embarrassment.

This final section in the 'Classic Stage' examines a number of single, stand-alone strips that are anomalous or distinctive. It may be they are exceptionally well-crafted images which evidently have taken more creative investment than a statutory day's making to produce, and therefore presumably drawings that Collins invested an inordinate amount of time in for personal satisfaction beyond deadline constraints. They may be exceptional or unusual within the ordinary narrative contexts of the strip, of instances where characters reveal emotional depths, opinions or desires more complex than the cartoon personalities established within the broader context of the strip.

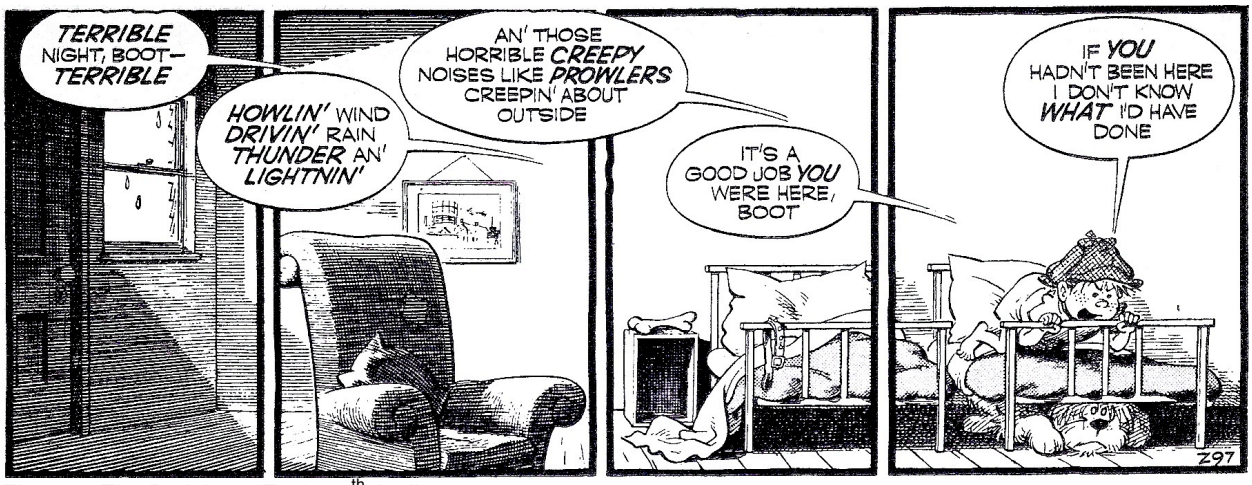


Fig 5.82 *The Perishers* (Z97), 25th April 1966

In this strip the drawing begins in darkness and ends in bright light, and is composed of visual texture and patterning. The panel borders subdivide the scene into a series of single pictures, each with an individual atmosphere. Wellington's verbal exposition simultaneously tracks across the scene in the way information is revealed as the visual texture of the world shifts from realistic figurative delineation to a cartoon language.

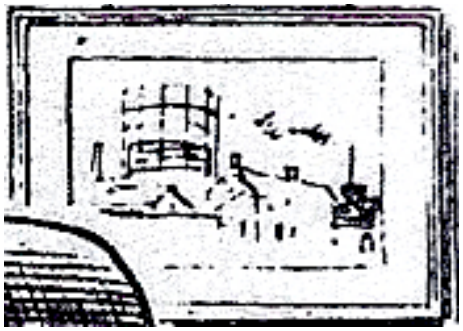


Fig 5.83 *The Perishers* (Z97) (detail), 25th April 1966

The framed picture on the wall of a gas tower, terraced houses and a smoking factory chimney is reminiscent of a typical *Perishers* background and indicative of Wellington's domestic aesthetic.

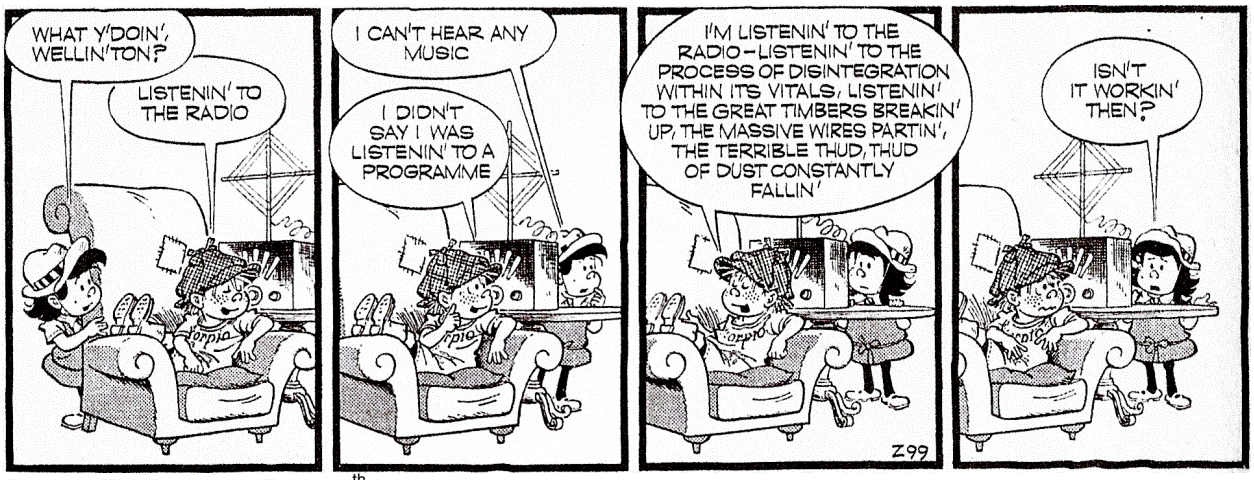


Fig 5.84 *The Perishers* (Z99), 27th April 1966

Maisie peers around Wellington's armchair, curiously querulous, and asks 'What y'doin', Wellington?', who says 'listenin' to the radio'. When Maisie says she can't hear anything he states 'I didn't say I was listenin' to a programme. I'm listenin' to the radio – listenin' to the process of disintegration within its vitals, listenin' to the great timbers breakin' up, the massive wires partin', the terrible thud, thud of dust constantly fallin'. This monologue, with its repetition of 'listenin'', macrocosmic interpretation of the minute workings of the radio and apocalyptic description of decay and collapse is unusually poetical.

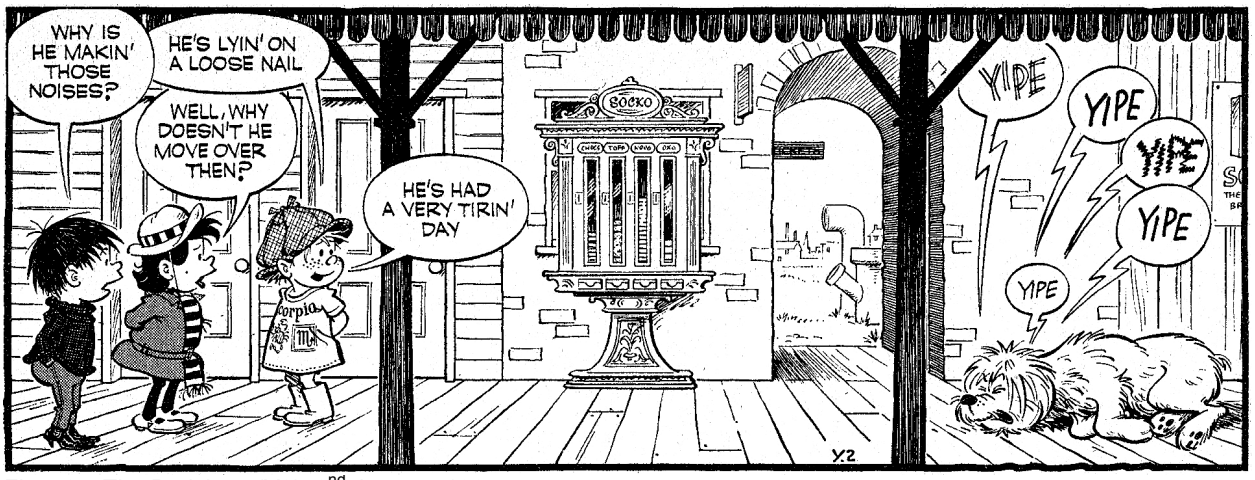


Fig 5.85 *The Perishers* (Y2), 2nd January 1965

Here the children discuss a dreaming Boot with the empty central space creating a building sense of expectation before the visual punchline. This compositional delay is achieved by the subdivision of a single picture using an intrinsic element of the image, in this instance the platform's structural supports. This creates the effect of a three-panel strip and slows the reader's eye as they track across the image. The 'roof' of the strip is demarcated by the decorative platform canopy which adds to the enclosure of space within the strip.

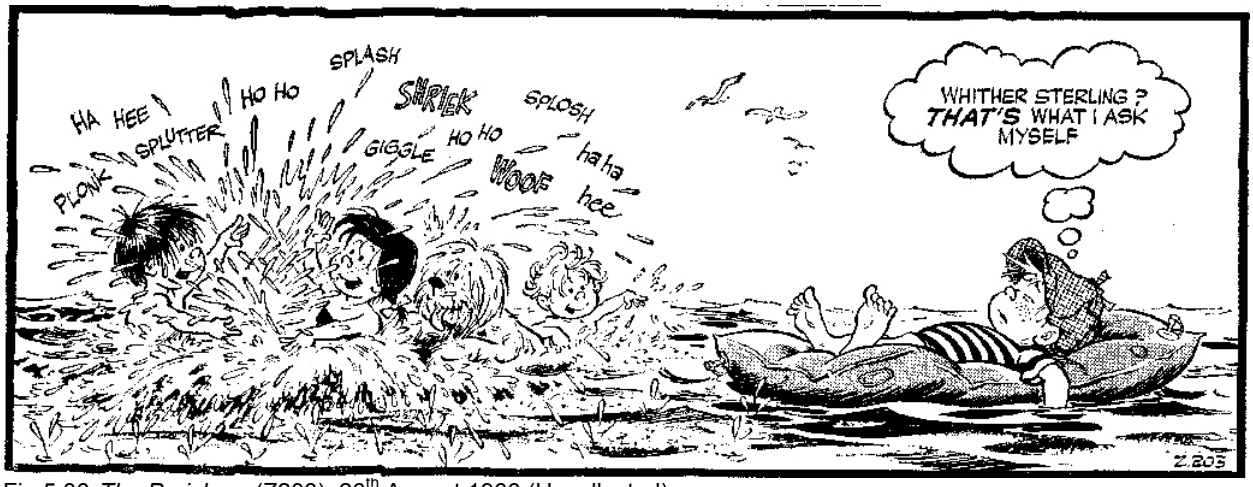


Fig 5.86 *The Perishers* (Z203), 26th August 1966 (Uncollected)

There is a distinct balance of the verbal and visual in this strip. The left-hand side of the panel with its childlike scene of pure holiday pleasure is contrasted with Wellington's supposed placidity disguising underlying anxiety. As a single drawing rather than a sequence of panels, the image more closely resembles an editorial cartoon in its conflation of the personal and the political.

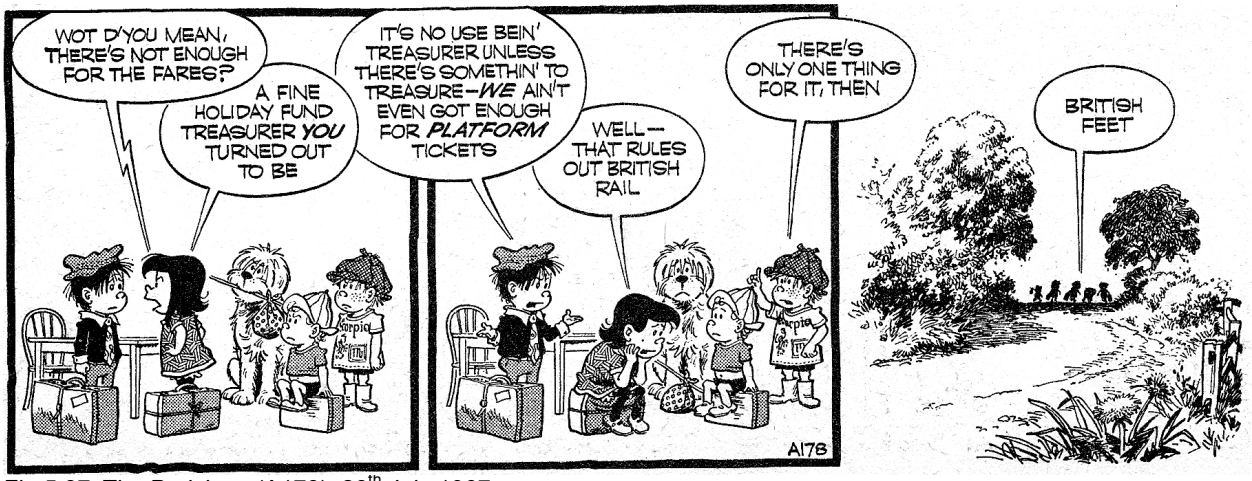


Fig 5.87 *The Perishers* (A178), 28th July 1967

The rare use of the borderless image or 'vignette' marks a clear distinction between the two styles of image-making in this strip. In the first two panels the characters bicker over financial responsibilities, articulated by Marlon's logic with the line 'It's no use bein' treasurer unless there's somethin' to treasure.' The lack of borders in the final panel gives a sense of the image floating in both time and space. Tom Lubbock has written of this vignette form that

> Without a frame, we do not look through at a depicted world. There is no window to set the scene back behind it. The image lies on the surface of the paper … The scene materialises out of the surrounding page.[39]

The dandelions and fence edge in the foreground counter-weight and frame the drawing as if the viewer is leaning on a stile looking up the pathway to the disappearing children.

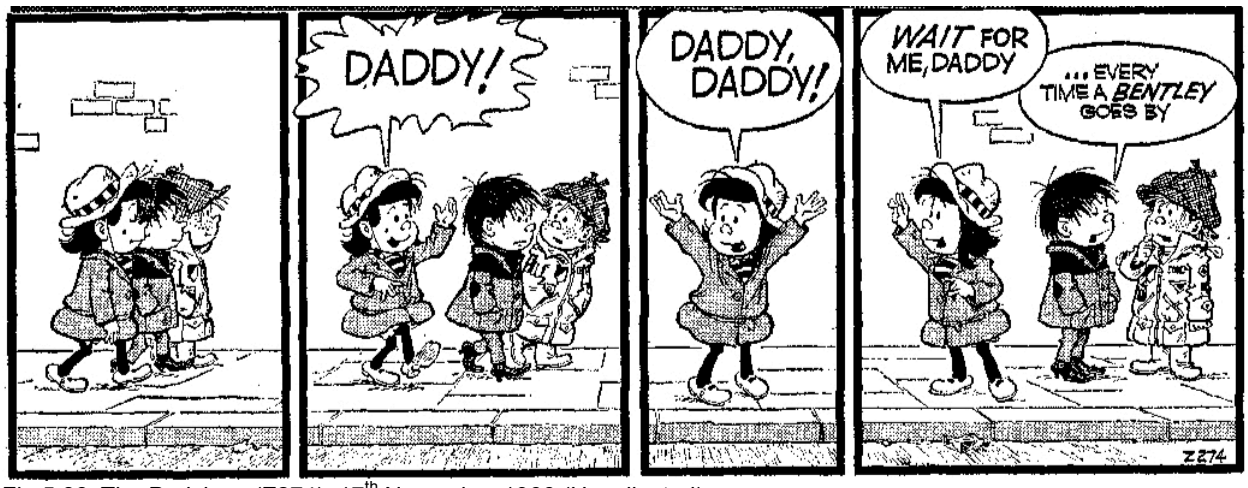


Fig 5.88 *The Perishers* (Z274), 17th November 1966 (Uncollected)

Perhaps one of the oddest and most uncomfortable *Perishers* strips. By now Maisie's love of money and power has been established, and this strip suggests that she will transfer her paternal affection to any owner of a Bentley. Father figures are rarely referred to in *The Perishers*, excepting BH (Calcutta) Failed's acknowledgement that his father was a 'two-gunner'. Wellington's orphan-ness is key to his circumstances, Maisie and Baby Grumpling's mother and Marlon's mother are often-mentioned or heard off-panel, and Boot's mother is at one point represented as a tin of shoe polish. Maisie's excitement turns to desperation as she turns to track the movement of the unseen car passing.

[39] Lubbock, *English Graphic*, p. 131.

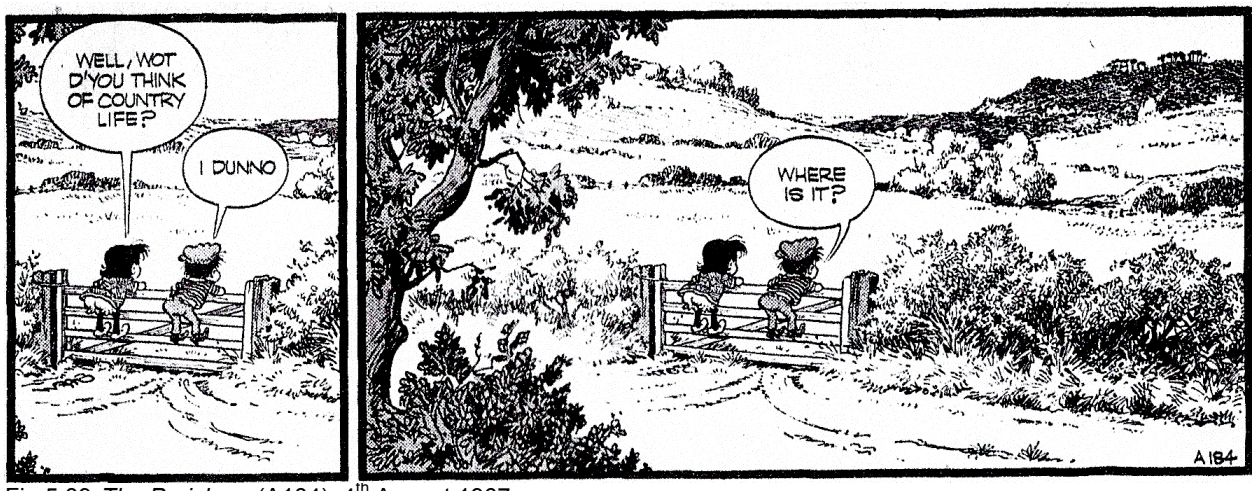


Fig 5.89 *The Perishers* (A184), 4th August 1967

An unusual strip illustratively and tonally in the way Marlon's obtuseness is so unreadable – is he stating that the countryside is lifeless in that it's merely picturesque or that he does not see the 'life' in the view? Compositionally it is an adroit two-panel structure – the larger second panel is comprised of the first panel repeated with extra landscape before and behind the children, as if the view has expanded to become widescreen. Although they remain the same size visually this diminishes the children within the greater landscape; the effect is that the reader's eye has panned back but the children have remained the same scale, akin to a cinematic 'pull focus' technique.

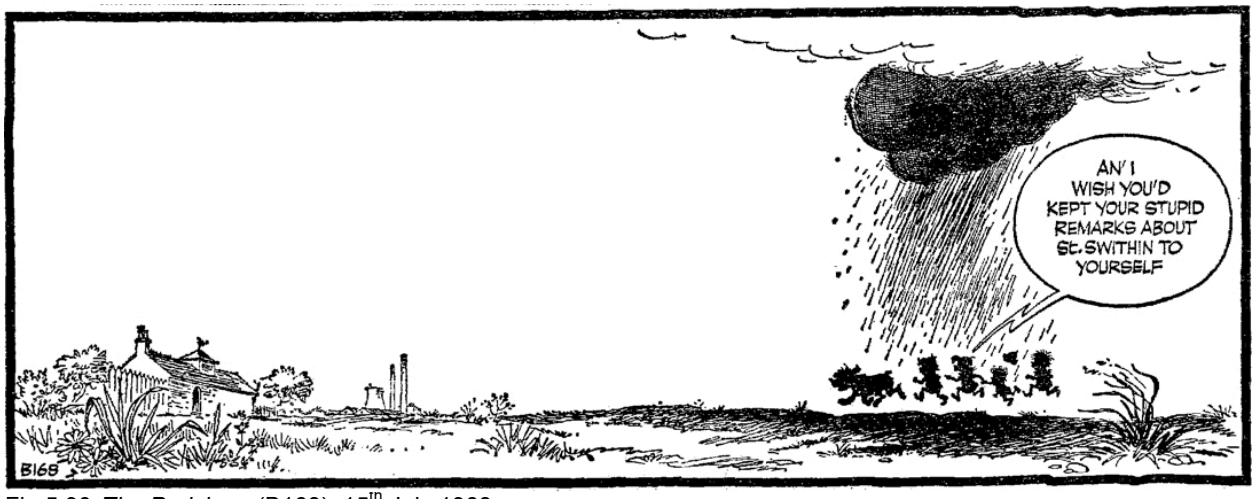


Fig 5.90 *The Perishers* (B168), 15th July 1968

Compositionally this strip could have been reversed and the reader's eye would have logically travelled from the left-hand side, where the rain is starting, to the right-hand side where he shelter of Wellington's railway station waits. Reading from right to left is counter-intuitive and visually extends the distance the children have to run to achieve safety. Even the grass in the foreground is pulled backwards in space and time as the children pull it into their slipstream as

they race past. Collins has structured the strip so that the children are effectively running 'against' time, thereby slowing and prolonging their discomfort.

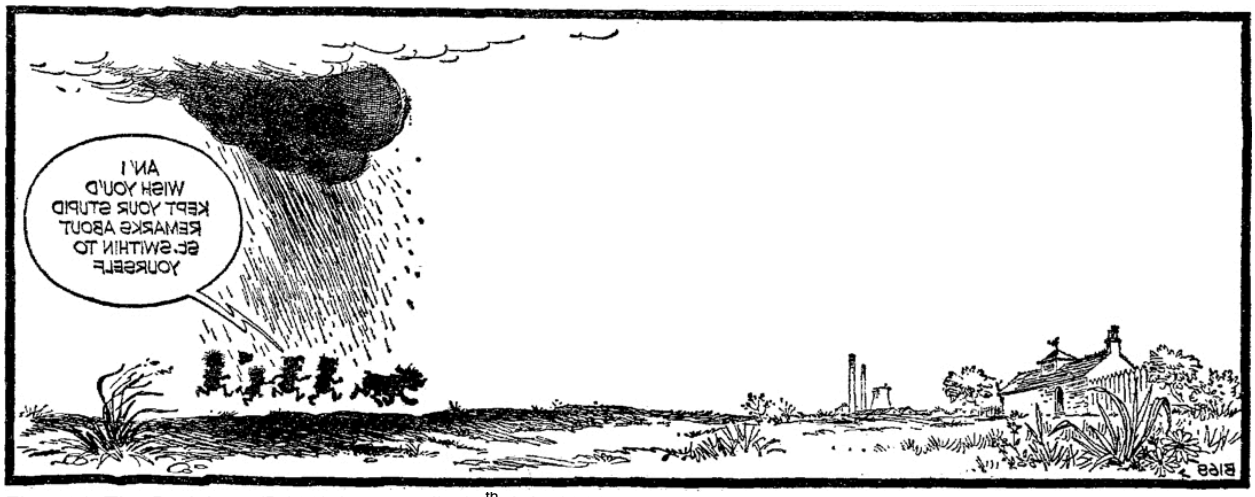


Fig 5.91 *The Perishers* (B168) (reversed), 15th July 1968

In this 'flipped version' the rain is 'pushing' the figures towards the beatific calm of the station while the crabgrass is pulled along in their wake.

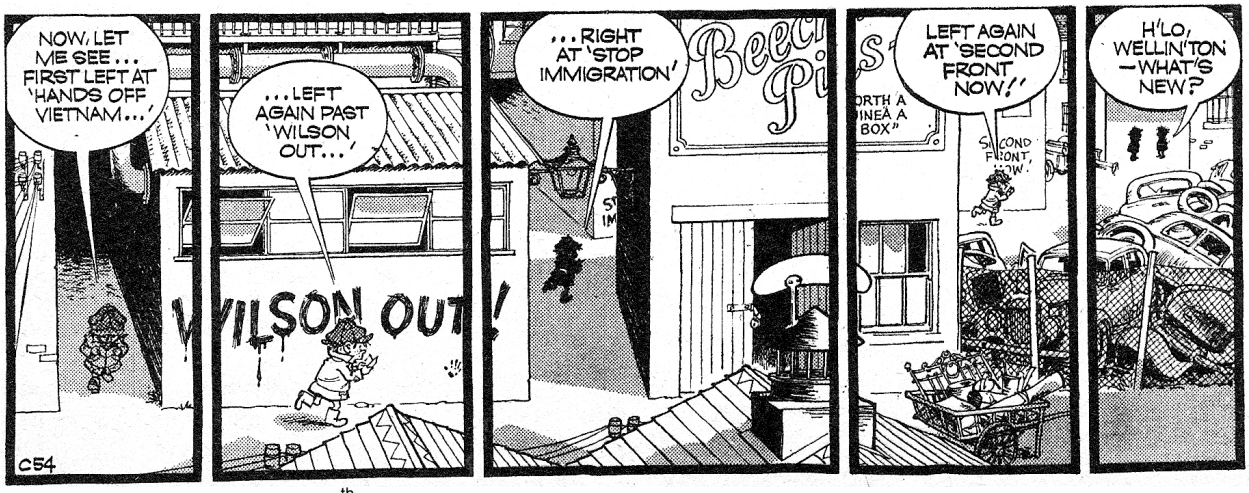


Fig 5.92 *The Perishers* (C54), 4th March 1969

In this polyptych Wellington is walking a dense urban maze, navigating the streets by the graffiti. These messages span some period of time, the Beecham's Pills' sign conceivably Victorian, and 'Second Front Now' dating from the Second World War. These texts create the sense of a parallel, graffitied history constantly accreting in an environment, as affirmed by Marlon's asking 'What's New?.' In a way it suggests the visual world of *The Perishers* during its 'Classic Stage' as a generative space, a living lexicon of new verbal and visual approaches responding to cultural and socio-political events and consistently added to through its lifetime.

The 'Eyeballs-In-The-Sky!'

As the 'Classic Stage develops through the 1960s the rockpool sequence becomes an annual fixture of the strip reflecting and responding to socio-political events and cultural phenomena.

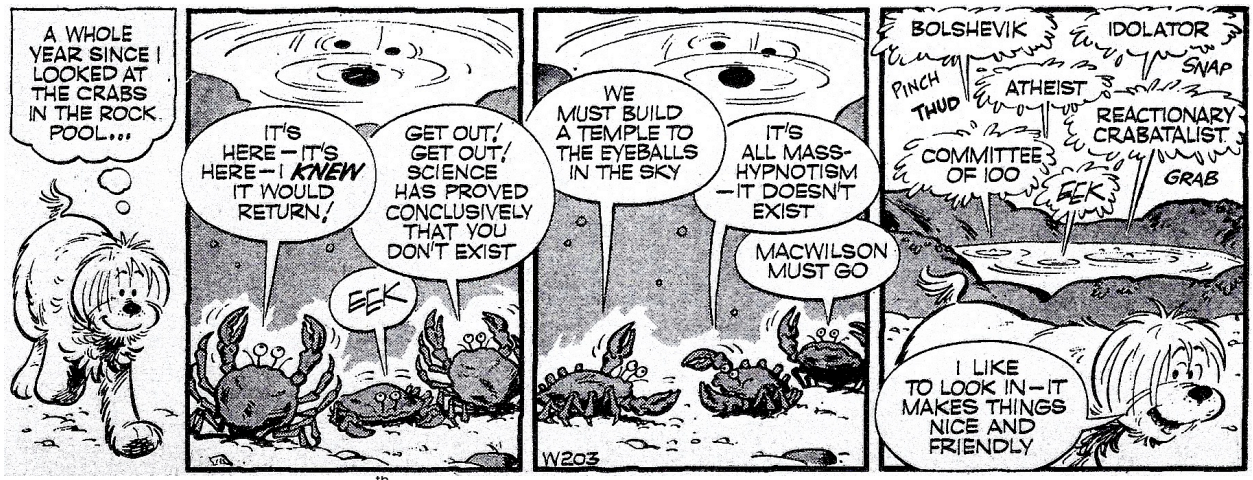


Fig 5.93 *The Perishers* (W203), 26th August 1963

In 1963 the phrase 'The Eyeballs In The Sky' is first spoken. The schism between the believing Gerald and his suspicious fellow crabs has now widened; when Gerald demands that 'We must build a temple to the Eyeballs In the Sky,' the voices of (presumably) Charles and Rodney accuse the response to Boot's appearance as 'mass-hypnotism', imply it's a government plot with 'MacWilson must go' and call for a 'Committee of 100' in reference to the 1960-inaugurated direct action anti-war movement headed by Bertrand Russell.

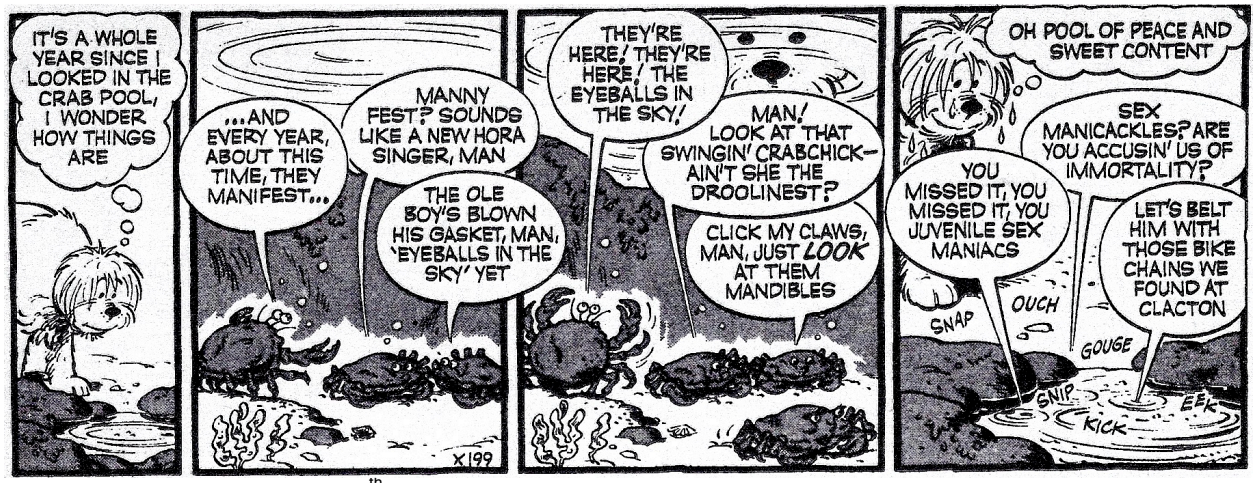


Fig 5.94 *The Perishers* (X199), 20th August 1964

By 1964 the crabs have rejected the rhetoric of religious and political ideology and instead embraced the emergent 'pop' sensibility. The punning exchanges between the crabs begin with

a reference to the eyeballs becoming ‘manifest’ mutating to the name ‘Manny Fest’ and the observation that this ‘sounds like a new Hora singer.’ Yiddish references lead in turn to an exchange about ‘sex maniacs’ turned to ‘sex manicackles’ which leads to a crab declaring ‘Let’s belt him with those bike chains we found at Clacton’, a reference to the seaside battle between mods and rockers that first occurred on Easter Bank Holiday weekend a few months before the strip’s publication.

Old Boot’s reference to pool of ‘peace, and sweet content’ quotes from Robert Burns’ ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’ and ‘Second Front Now’ refers to the 1943 call for the Allied Powers to invade France. Other exchanged epithets such as ‘Onion Lateralist’ and the threat to ‘kick your tripes out’ are derived from Aristotelian logic and Army slang. This punning amalgam of philosophical allusions and low vernacular, a form of comic verbal montage, is reminiscent of a screwball or farcical sensibility with British precedents being music hall, radio and comedies like ‘The Goons’, ‘Round the Horne’ and the ‘Carry On’ films. The writing relies on a combination of devices such as slang, puns, homophones and double entendres. In the ‘Eyeballs’ sequences the great weight of humour is on the verbal rather than the visual, as Collins’ drawings are for the most part simply of crabs either scuttling about waving their claws in the air or rolling on their backs.

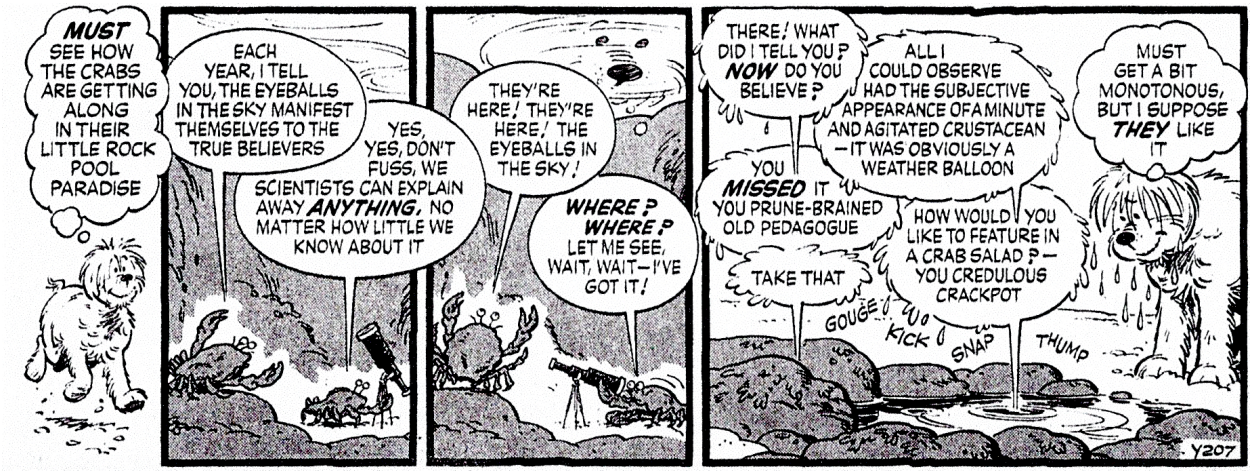


Fig 5.95 *The Perishers* (Y207), 31st August 1965

In 1965 the crabs have foregone pop music references and become a combination of an evangelist meeting and a UFO-spotters convention competitively dedicated to the appearance of ‘The Eyeballs’. In a typical slapstick trope the crab scientist views Boot through the wrong end of a telescope and declares what he observed has ‘the subjective appearance of a minute and agitated crustacean … obviously a weather balloon’, the inevitable official retort to any unsubstantiated sighting of a UFO.

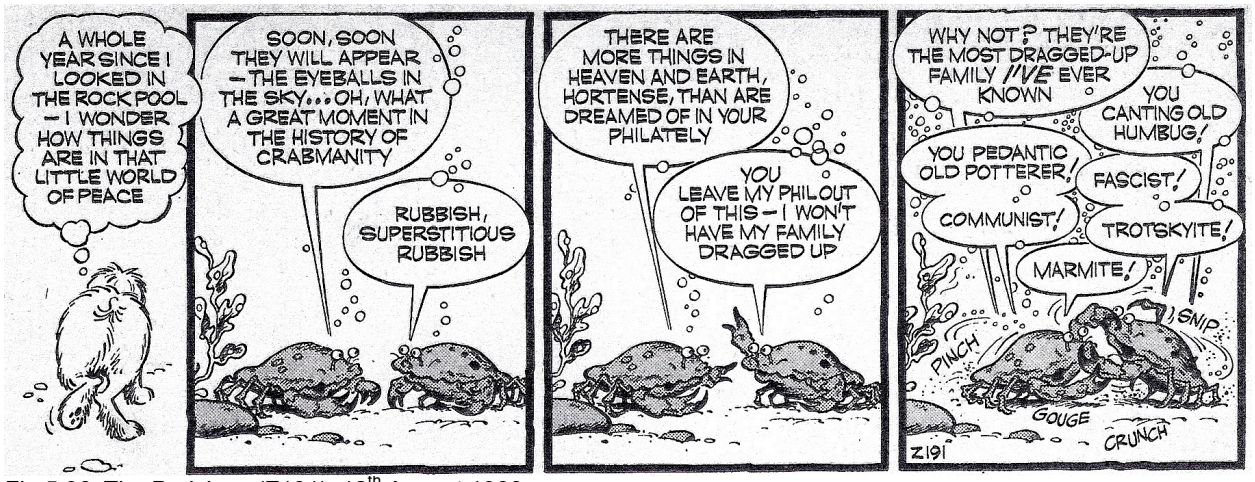


Fig 5.96 *The Perishers* (Z191), 12th August 1966

In 1966 there are initially only two crabs in the rock pool awaiting Old Boot's annual appearance. One of the crabs misquotes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy' but replacing 'philosophy' with 'philately'. There is then a camp exchange where one crab accuses the other's family of being 'the most dragged up family *I've* ever known' only to be rebuffed by the other calling them 'a canting old humbug' which, although 'cant' is a legitimate term for criminal slang, is also close enough to 'cunting' to cause the reader to double-take. The sequence devolves into a drunken binge culminating in a crab unusually breaking the surface of the pool to noisily hiccup, waking a dozing Boot.

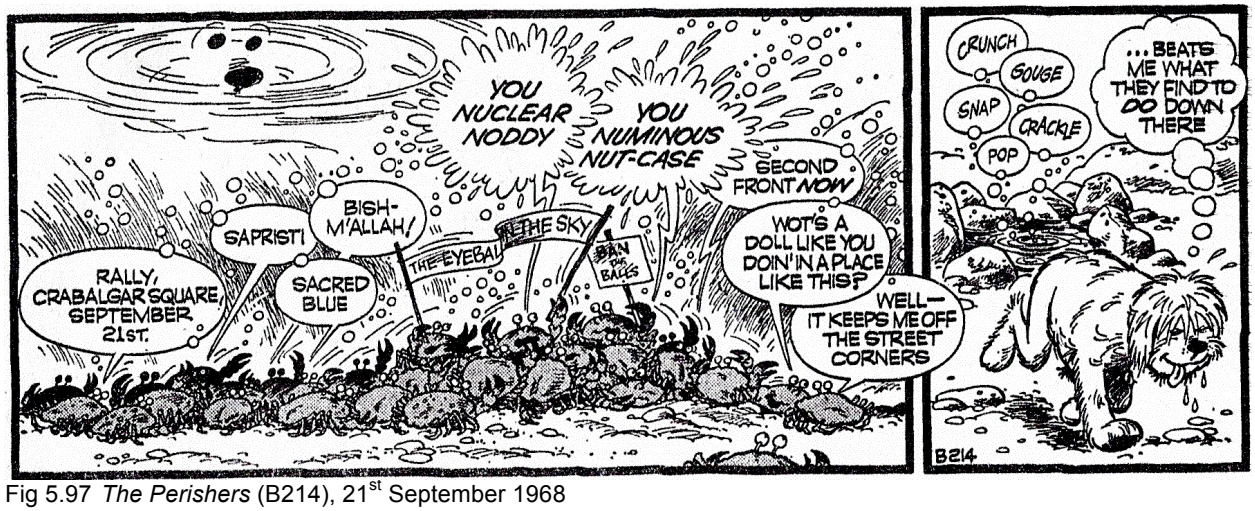


Fig 5.97 *The Perishers* (B214), 21st September 1968

At the end of the 1968 sequence a full-scale riot breaks out between the denizens of the rockpool. On 17th March that year an anti-Vietnam War rally attended by Tariq Ali and Vanessa Redgrave had begun at Trafalgar Square and marched to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square where there was one of the most famous street confrontations of the 1960s with the police. Dodd maintained a six-month lead-in time between writing strips and their publication.

As these strips were published in September they would have been scripted in March just after the riots. This comic response (albeit delayed) to real events in ‘Mirror’ newspaper strips is unusual to *The Perishers*, the only other British strip to achieve an equivalent topicality being Wally Fawkes’ ‘Daily Mail’ strip *Flook*. The riot sets a template that recurs from now on, where the ‘Eyeballs’ sequence descends into hurled insults and chaos.

5.3 The 'Age Of Refinement' (mid 1969-mid 1975)

In Schatz's four-stage model of a cultural property, the third stage is the 'Age of Refinement', the period during which 'certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form.'[40] In *The Perishers* this means that the narrative and visual experimentation of the 1960s is supplanted by an evenness of rhythm and pace that continues through the 1970s. The numerous political and cultural references diminish as the strip becomes more focussed on the interplay between the characters. The central relationship between Wellington and Boot becomes proscribed by domesticity with a comedic focus on household chores, the balancing of responsibilities and a constant niggling resentment. Maisie continues to pursue Marlon and Baby Grumpling eats worms, digs holes and burrows under the ground. The beginning of the 1970s was the point at which I began to read *The Perishers*, an unsettled and unsettling period in British history marked by industrial action, radical hippy politics, youth tribalism, football hooliganism and IRA bombing campaigns. The streets were where social, political and cultural conflicts were enacted, and the landscape of *The Perishers* reflects that shift visually. The children begin to play in treacherous-looking adventure playgrounds and negotiate underpasses and flyovers, while Boot and BH wander through junkyards filled with vertiginous stacks of rusting cars.

The main character development in the 'Age of Refinement' is when Boot discovers his true past. Boot's awareness of a previous life is introduced in this 1970 strip where he reminisces

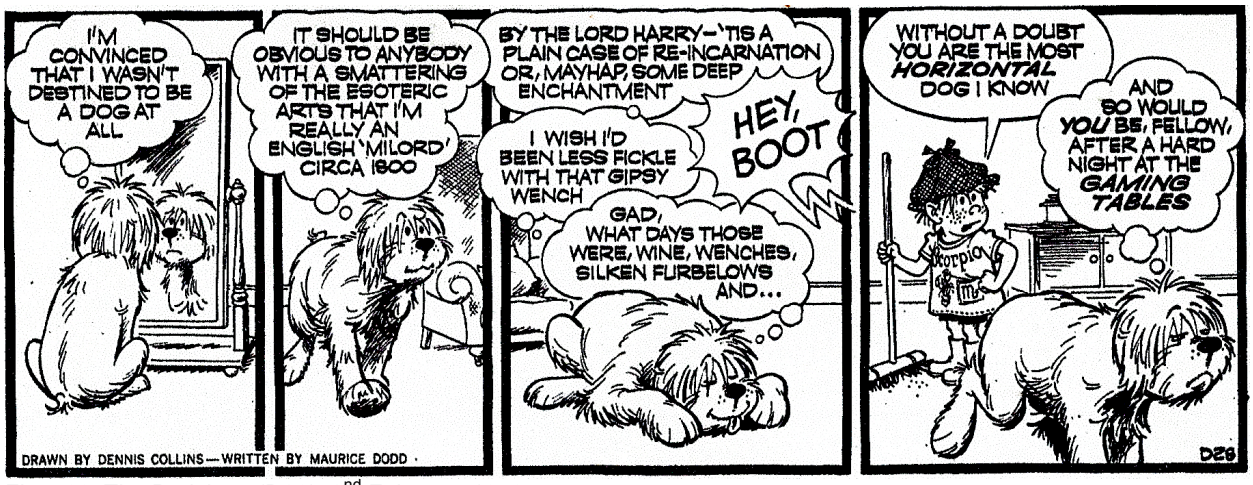


Fig 5.98 *The Perishers* (D28), 2nd February 1970

about really being 'an English 'Milord' circa 1800', the victim of a 'gypsy wench' who trapped him in the body of a sheepdog. The realisation of this 'true' identity gives Boot a new-found sense of superiority over Wellington. As the narrative progresses he discovers more lurid detail

[40] Schatz, quoted in Coogan, *A Comic Studies Reader*, p.91.

of his past life history; that he was 'Captain Boot of O'Bunion's Intruders – a company of freebooters and freesockers and freemealers and anything else which was going.'[41]

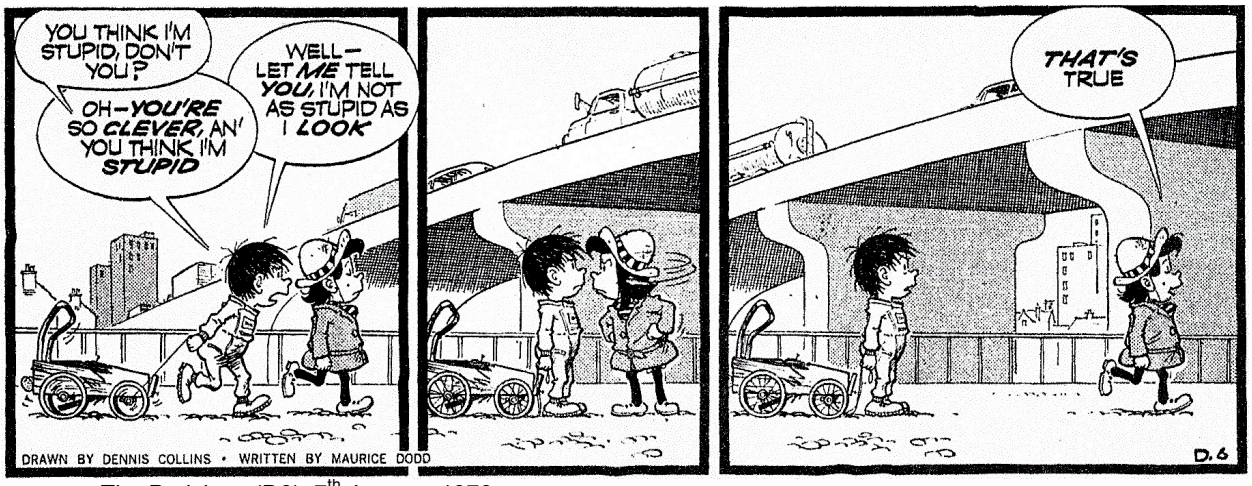


Fig 5.99 *The Perishers* (D6), 7th January 1970

This is an early example of the brutalist urban architecture that begins to envelop the characters in the 1970s. There had been suggestions of tower blocks encroaching on the horizon for a few years, but now the landscape has changed substantially from the strip's early years of back-to-back terraces and bombsites. In this strip the constant flow of traffic above and clusters of tower blocks glimpsed through the concrete struts creates a new sense of inner-city ceaselessness.

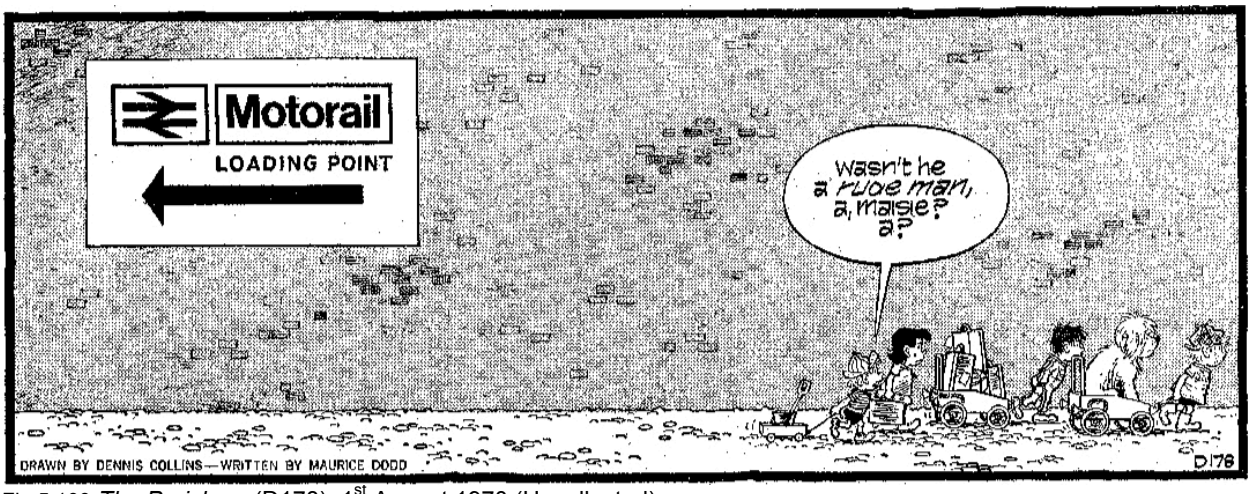


Fig 5.100 *The Perishers* (D178), 1st August 1970 (Uncollected)

Even in the annual holiday sequences there is a noticeable shift towards the urban. In 1970 the children are depicted drifting through London, a mobile shanty-town of buggies and belongings, negotiating train station goods yards and railway arches.

[41] *The Perishers Omnibus 1984*, p. 3.

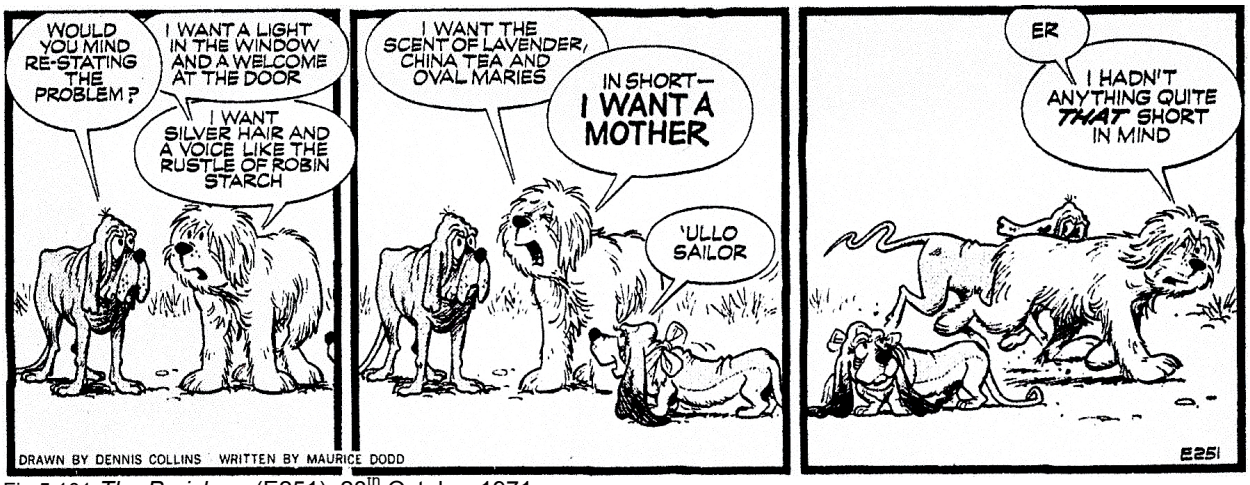


Fig 5.101 *The Perishers* (E251), 28th October 1971

In 1971 Boot realises he never knew his mother. This new existential crisis coincides with the first appearance of Tatty Oldbitt, 'The Sailor's Friend.' As BH Calcutta is a gently mocking caricature of a British Asian Indian, so Tatty, as her name punningly implies, is the epitome of a drunkenly blousy barfly. She arrives with her trademark opening conversational gambit ''Ullo Sailor', ears, tail and belly dangling in the manner of an old basset hound. Tatty's other come-on lines include 'Give Us A Kiss,' 'I'm Yours I'm Yours' and 'Give A Girl A Grapple.' Where Boot is constantly fearful and attempting to escape her overtures, BH Calcutta is eager to make her acquaintance, and the two invariably end sequences running away together towards the horizon.

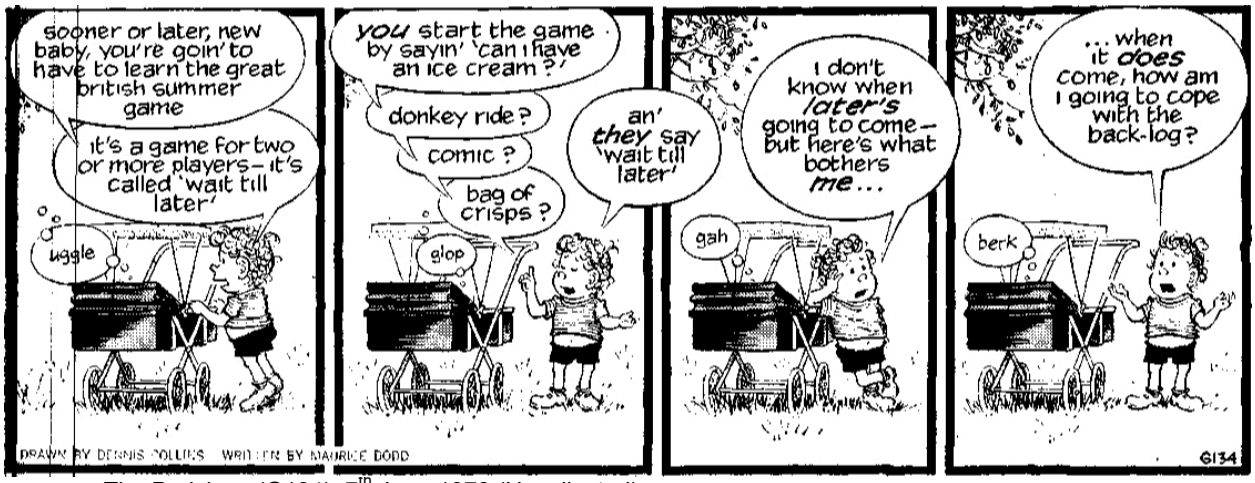


Fig 5.102 *The Perishers* (G134), 7th June 1973 (Uncollected)

The only character lower than Grumpling in the social hierarchy is the 'new baby', his younger brother. Here Grumpling advises the never-seen infant of his own child-centred understanding of the social pecking order. His younger brother simply responds with gurgling baby-speak, visualized by lower-case text within droolingly bubbling speech balloons. His vocalising of 'glop'

recalls one of Dodd's favourite strips *Popeye*, whose adopted son Swee'pea only emits the same noise.

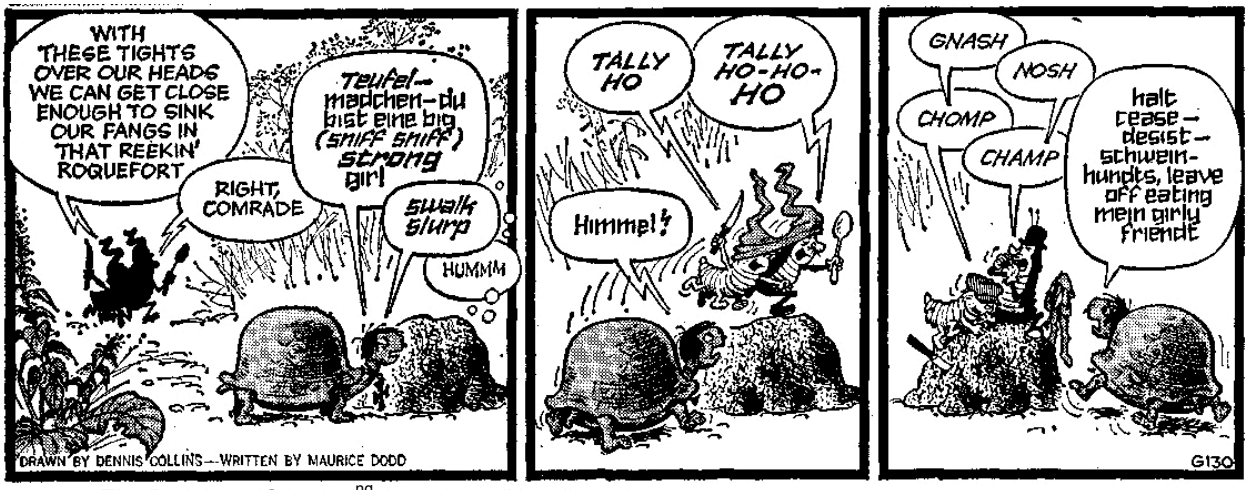


Fig 5.103 *The Perishers* (G130), 2nd June 1973 (Uncollected)

Through the 1970s Fred and the caterpillar's calls for direct action and revolution dissipate as they do in the real world. Occasionally there is a general flash of leftist indignation, but for the most part the insects simply attempt to survive and take advantage of any passing opportunity. In this strip they have come across a lump of French cheese which they are simultaneously excited by and yet accuse of degeneracy as if it represents the epitome of European decadence.

Where the 'Experimental Stage' tested numerous narrative and stylistic devices, and the 'Classic Stage' established a linguistic and illustrative complexity to the strip more refined than any contemporaneous British strip, the 'Age of Refinement' established a set of tropes and devices that became increasingly schematic and repetitious. For example, taking 1973 as the halfway point through Dodd and Collins' 28-year run from 1959 to 1987, the programme of events across the year run as follows: In the year's first strip Wellington walks into a waist-deep puddle in the rain. Subsequently Grumpling thinks the other children are going to prison rather than school and takes to his Spacehopper, Maisie chases Marlon for a kiss and Wellington for his chips; the children walk under a flyover and get duffed up by the Genghis Street gang; Maisie starts to charge money for being nice; Wellington and Boot spring clean; Boot and BH loll about; Maisie and Plain Jane demand equal rights for women and enlist Beryl Bogey' support; Wellington tries in vain to train Boot to clean the house; Boot tries in vain to train BH to smell; Grumpling continues to bounce around on his Spacehopper; Fred Beetle and the caterpillar discover and try to eat a Roquefort cheese; Adolph Kilroy the tortoise falls in love with the French cheese; Wellington gets rained on; Grumpling talks to the new baby in its pram; Wellington wrests the cheese from Adolph; Marlon makes an 'inch thick *baked bean* sandwich';

Maisie chases Marlon and Wellington cuts the grass; school breaks up and Marlon attempts bird-watching; the children pack for holiday, with Maisie modelling an army sergeant's shirt, striped socks and clogs and marching the gang across the countryside; they set the tent up in the dark, go swimming and Boot visits the rockpool where the crabs have built a tin-can telescope; the gang walk home in the rain and Wellington and Boot have no food at home bar one sausage; Maisie and Wellington argue politics and Wellington tries to sell Marlon a buggy; Boot mind-controls everyone to give Wellington sausages for his birthday; Marlon builds a bird table and an argumentative parrot takes it over; Wellington has no money for coal and stages a 'Chrismass Bizarre' with a lucky dip at which Marlon wins an elephant's foot umbrella stand.

Most of these scenarios were to be repeated in subsequent years.

The 'Eyeballs In The Sky'

The 1972 sequence marks the first reference to 'the pooliverse', the small area of water and rocks that the crabs inhabit and believe to be the beginning and end of creation.

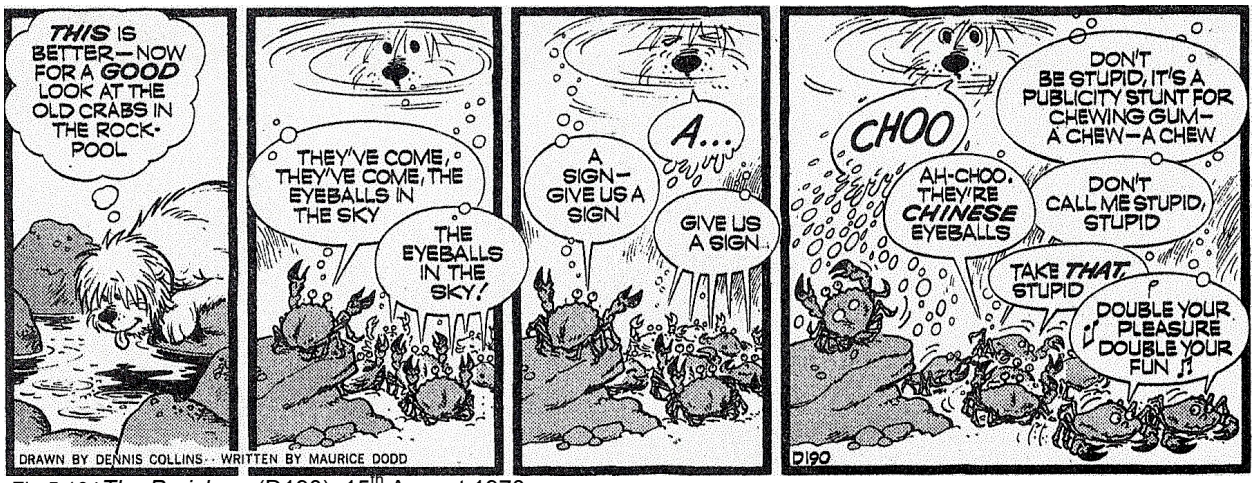


Fig 5.104 *The Perishers* (D190), 15th August 1970

As the 'Eyeballs' sequences develops through the years, cultural and political references accrete. In this 1970 run 'Double your pleasure, double your fun' quotes the adverts for Wrigley Doublemint gum, while 'Ho Ho How Chow Mein' is a portmanteau reference that conflates the Chinese take-away restaurant staple with Ho Chi Minh, then leader of the Viet Cong. It is also a bastardising of the popular chant 'Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh' which, together with 'Victory to the Vietcong', were regularly chanted at anti-Vietnam War demonstrations.

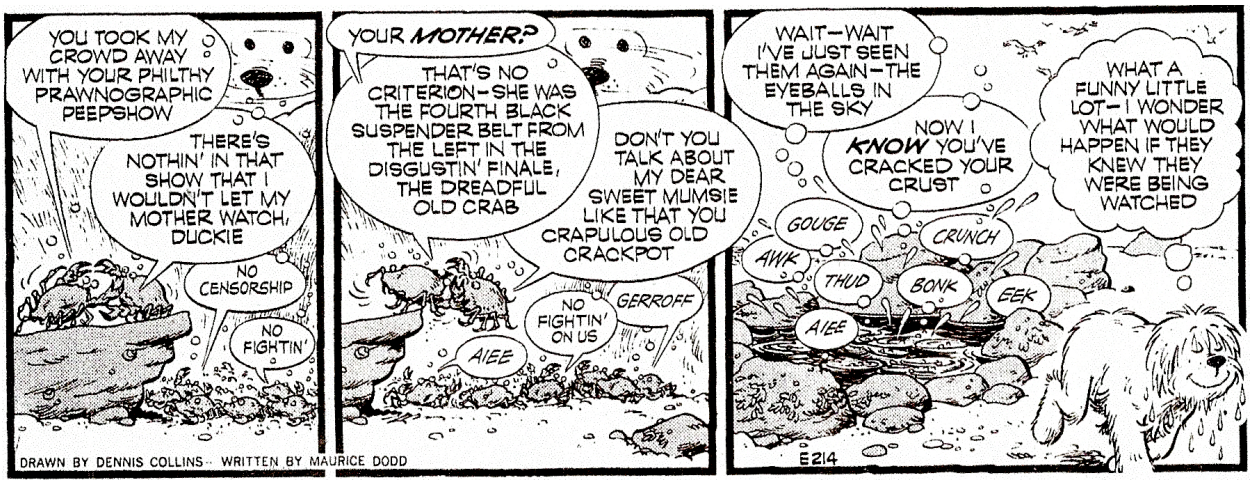


Fig 5.105 *The Perishers*, (E214), 9th September 1971

In 1971 the 'Eyeballs' strips focussed on just that – stripteases, and the increasing mainstreaming of the 'permissive society'. As historian Dominic Sandbrook has noted, 'By the late Sixties no visitor to Soho could miss the garish signs for strip-clubs, peep shows and private cinema clubs showing explicit films.'[42] The 'barker' outside the strip club calls out in the alliterative manner of the Victorian music hall compere, announcing '50 pretty pink popsies prepared to peel off before your very stalks,' the last phrase a twisting of Arthur Askey's catchphrase 'before your very eyes'. Increasingly the crabs recall a music-hall act, with reflexive and rhetorical speech patterns. Puns like 'highballs', 'claw and order' and 'space crabsule' mine every possible conflation of shellfish anatomy and contemporary cultural referencing. As Boot leaves he muses 'I wonder what would happen if they knew they were being watched.' There is a duality to this observation; whereas he does not know the crabs' activities are in response to his intervention, this is also a reference to the newspaper audience's gaze.

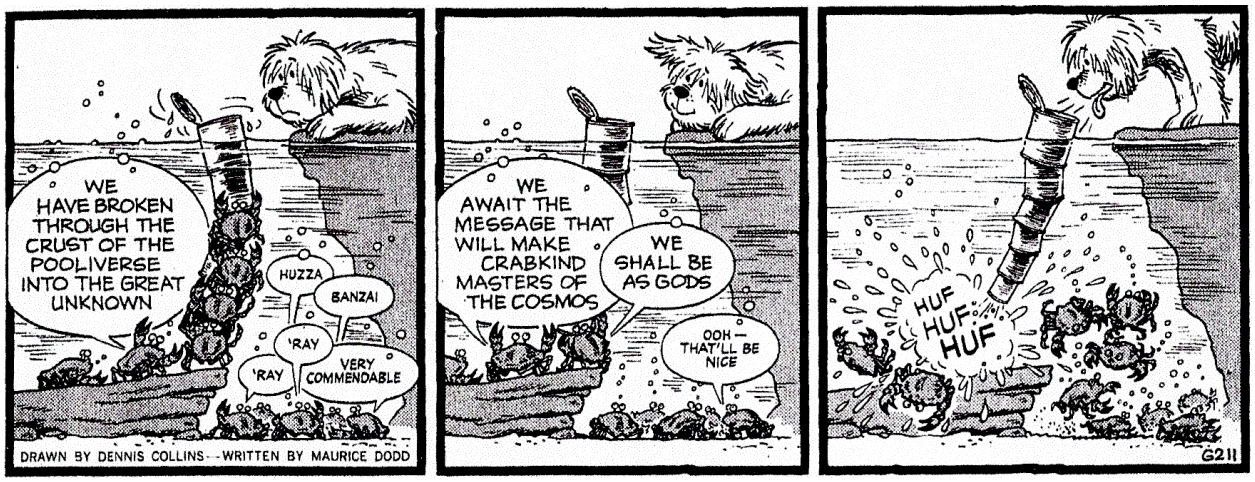


Fig 5.106 *The Perishers* (G211), August 1973

[42] Sandbrook, *White Heat*, p. 574.

By 1973 the ‘Eyeballs’ sequence has expanded in length to over a fortnight. The key formal experiment in this year is the ‘cutaway’ view where the rockpool and Boot are both visible, the depth and structure of the rockpool more detailed. Beyond that minor development the ‘Eyeballs’ sequences, similarly to the other scenarios in the strip, are establishing a rigorously formulaic shape.

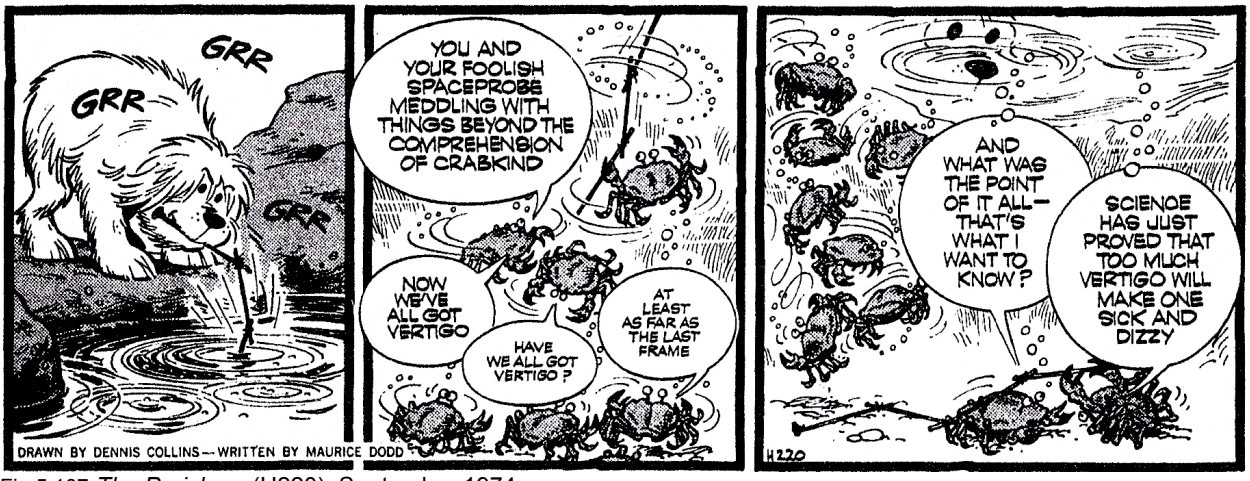


Fig 5.107 *The Perishers* (H220), September 1974

As the ‘Eyeballs’ passes its fifteenth year it has become an extended exercise in self-referentiality. The 1974 sequence comprises the chief crab comparing the spectacle to a striptease show, trying to sell ‘Eyeballs’-themed merchandise, becoming a guru figure, attempting a space-probe and announcing an ‘Eyeballs’ musical, all themes of previous years. One notable pun is in the middle strip, where one crab asks ‘Have we all got vertigo?’ and another replies ‘at least as far as the last frame.’ This breaking of the ‘fourth wall’ becomes a key trope in later years, with one crab asking ‘How long will this go on?’ to which the reply comes ‘Until the writer comes up with a real idea.’ There is also an exponential increase in lewd, camp, near-the-knuckle exchanges relating to ‘that stupid old fakir,’ ‘black stockins’ and suspenders,’ ‘bondage,’ kinky gippos,’ ‘oo wants to see *your* solid wotsit,’ ‘the sweet, young crablet with the monstrous mandibles,’ and ‘a close encounter of the peculiar kind.’ The crabs are mirroring, comically ironizing and commenting upon the new tabloid language that surrounds them, the post-permissive age of wife-swapping, suburban swingers and Page 3.

5.4 The 'Baroque Stage' (mid 1975-mid 1987)

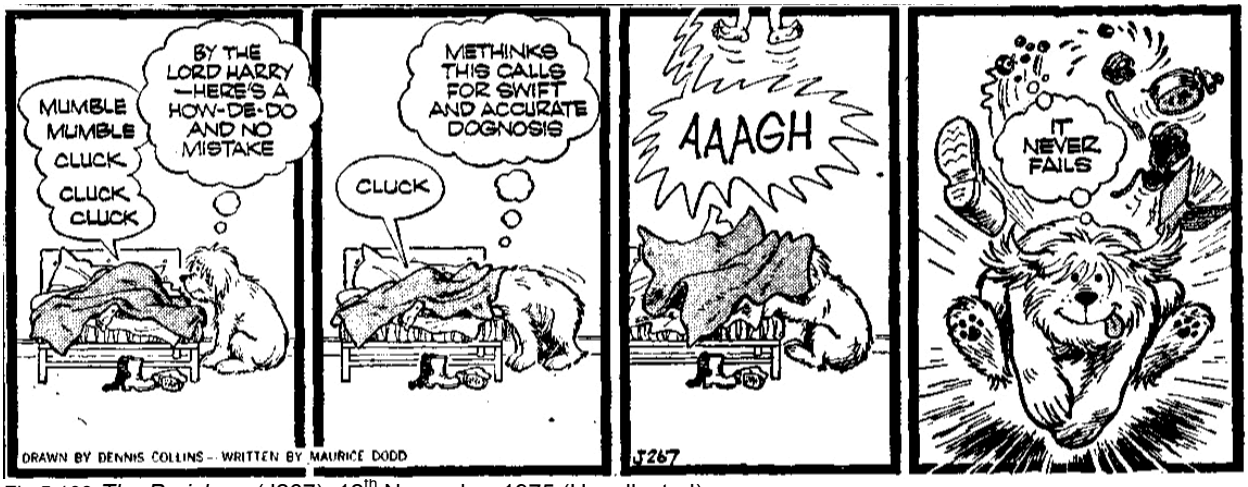


Fig 5.108 *The Perishers* (J267), 12th November 1975 (Uncollected)

The above strip marks the end of the 'Age of Refinement' and the beginning of the strip's 'Baroque Stage', the point Schatz defines as the '"mannerist" or "self-reflexive" stage … when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they are the "substance" or "content" of the work.'[43]

The final panel of Boot running towards the viewer dispenses with much of the visual subtlety of previous years' work, breaks the standard theatrical staging and instead demonstrates a more dynamic, kinetic approach in the use of speed lines and a sense of hurtling chaos. In a way the action or visual slapstick *becomes* the punchline or focus of the strip rather than any verbal or visual resolution.



Fig 5.109 *The Perishers* (J288), 6th December 1975 (Uncollected)

[43] Schatz, quoted in Coogan, *A Comic Studies Reader*, p.91.

In 1975 the strip stops being printed in a solus position and returns to the cartoon page to take up residence with *Andy Capp*, *The Fosdyke Saga*, *Garth*, *The Larks* and *Little Joe*, the last a strip aimed at children in the mould of *Sooty* and *Rupert*. The strip's visual autonomy is reduced with its return to the tiered page.

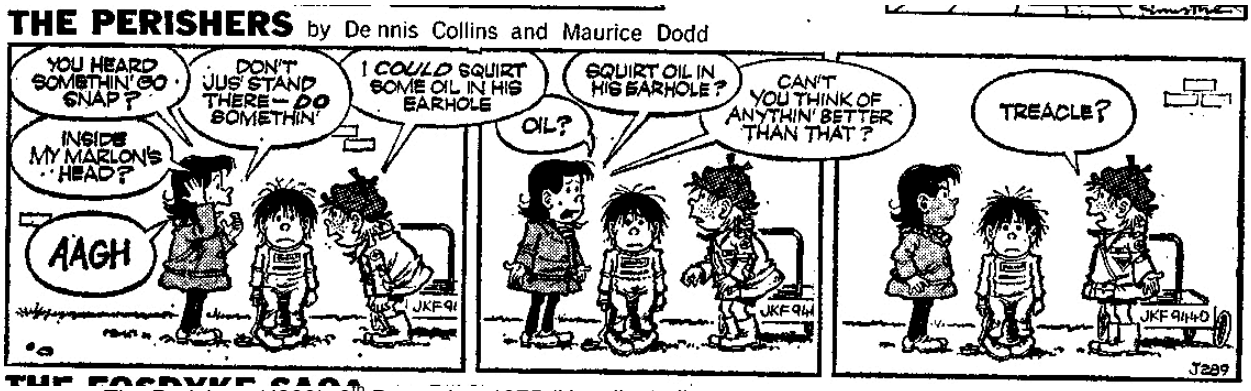


Fig 5.110 *The Perishers* (J289), 8th December 1975 (Uncollected)

The less wide and much lower format also has an immediate impact on the strip's content. Images and dialogue are crowded together more, decreasing the space between figures and dialogue and lowering the 'ceiling' of the image. The strip also loses its distinctive, hand-drawn logo and the height created by that design.

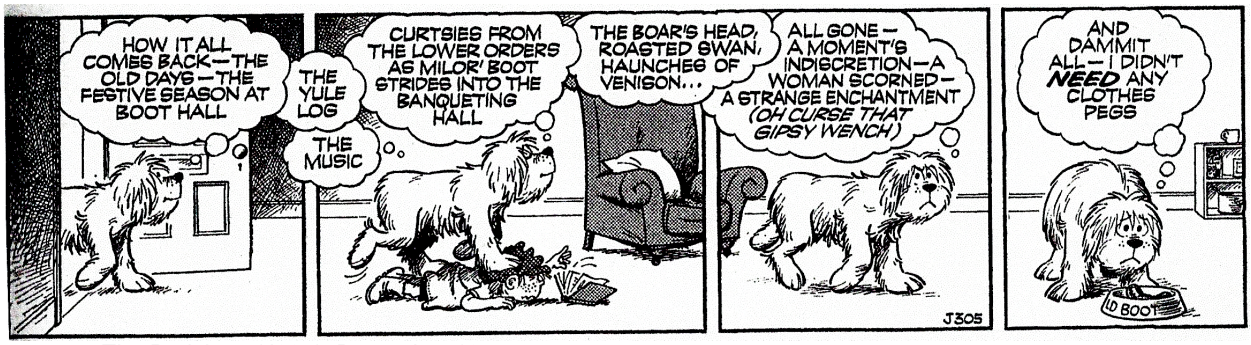


Fig 5.111 *The Perishers* (J305), December 1975

There is a diminished relationship between the physical action and the verbal narrative. In this strip Boot is seen musing on his reduced circumstances while thoughtlessly trampling Welllington and finding one sausage in his food bowl. There is little to no interplay between the content of his chain of thoughts and the nature of his physical wandering.

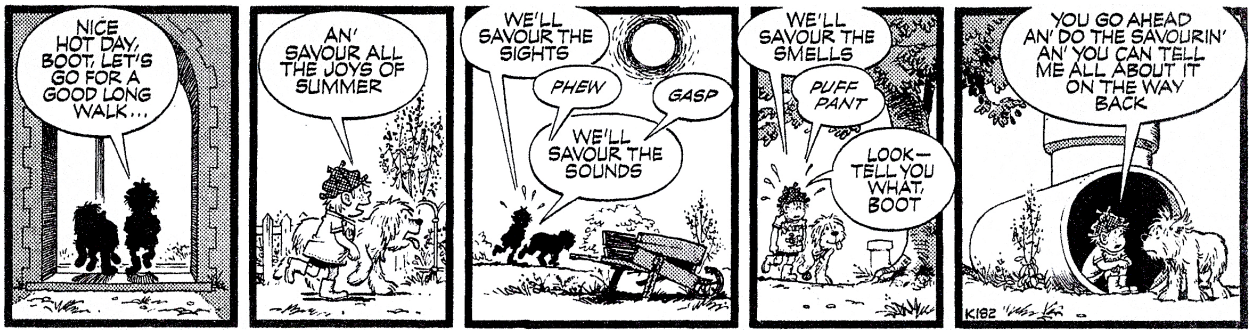


Fig 5.112 *The Perishers* (K182), August 1976

This strip takes place during the Summer heatwave of 1976 and is representative of a more subdued and simplistic atmosphere. Oddly, the strip culminates in the two characters returning to a pipe very similar to Wellington's first home.



Fig 5.113 *The Perishers* (L7), January 1977

As the strip continues into the 1970s Collins' line becomes looser, and background information such as trees and landscapes becomes increasingly ideographic rather than illustrative, fence posts free of knotholes and woodgrain and scudding clouds delineated only as hard areas of hatching and cross hatching. Collins drew all *The Perishers* strips from its inception in 1958 until early 1979 when his contribution to the strip is first interrupted. Strip N53 is a simple layout of a repeated image of a tree with a notice headed 'DOGS' attached to it. In the final panel Boot is drawn slyly loping out of the frame having urinated against the back of the tree, the side hidden from the reader.

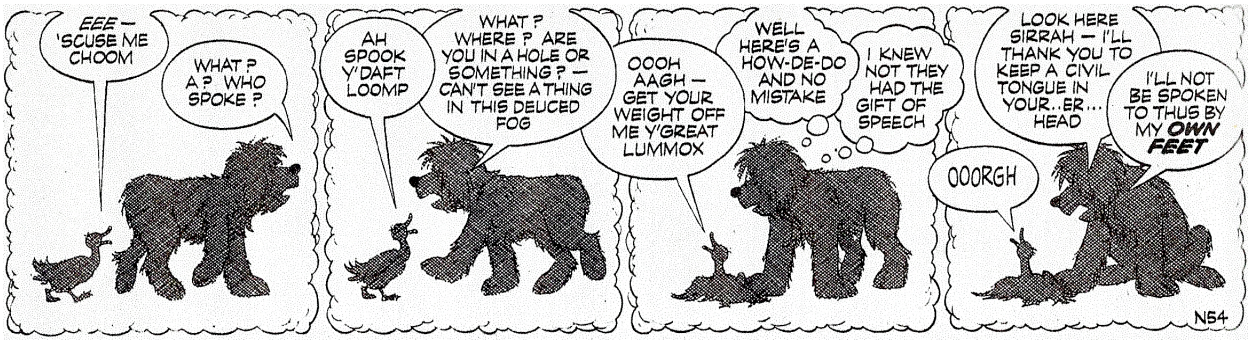


Fig 5.114 *The Perishers* (N54), February 1979

However, the next day's strip commences in a cloud of fog, with the puffy panel borders indicating visual haziness. This is an unprecedented shift of style, and there is no preamble to what becomes a two-week narrative of a conversation between Boot and a duck who are both depicted in a cross-hatched silhouette, devoid of detail. The narrative scenario seems to have been conceived of either as a way for Collins to produce a series of strips quickly and simply, or for a replacement artist to fill in and develop some feel for drawing the strip. When the fog clears after a week's strips Collins provides some bridging strips before other hands begin drawing the strip completely. Mike Dodd believes someone other than his father initially took on the drawing, noting 'I don't think my father took over immediately, they changed the look because my father wasn't as good an artist as Dennis Collins'.[44] In any event, there is a huge change from Collins' familiar illustrative style.

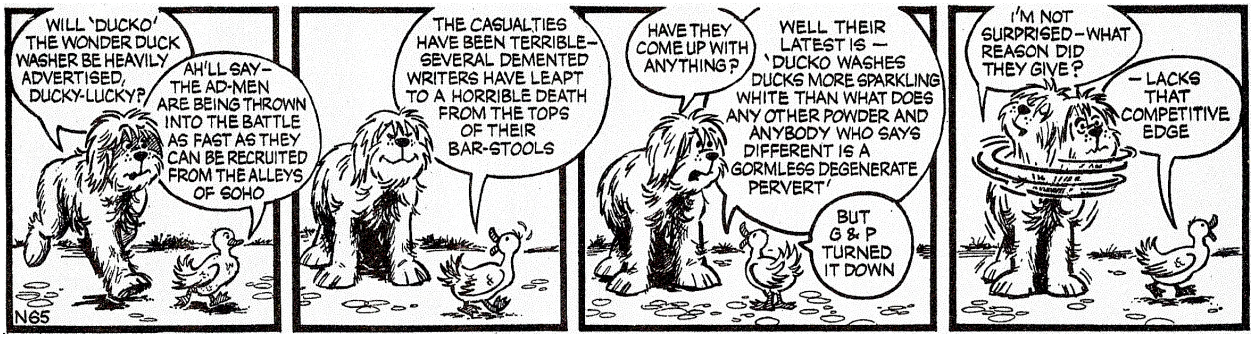


Fig 5.115 *The Perishers* (N65), March 1979

The new artist's line is thicker and cruder and speech balloons are clumsily placed and not as precisely round. It is possible Collins is still laying out the strips at this point as the figurework is more consistent than when Dodd later assumes full authorial control.



Fig 5.116 *The Perishers* (N73), March 1979

[44] Interview with Mike Dodd, 2008.

There are attempts made to mimic Collins techniques, here adopting the familiar polyptych format. However, the pacing is erratic, the landscape less authentic, the trees two-dimensionally rendered and the station doorway especially simplistic in its execution.

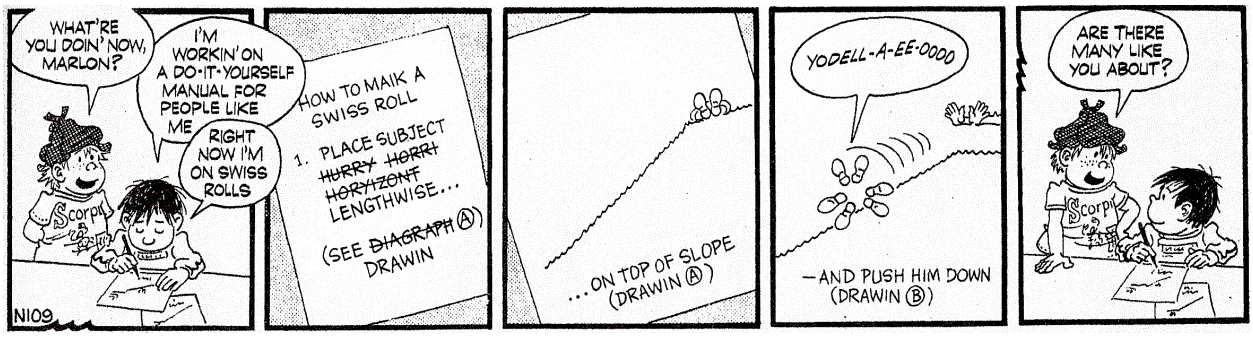


Fig 5.117 *The Perishers* (N109), April 1979

By April 1979 Dodd has begun drawing a sequence where Marlon's manual on becoming a brain surgeon is shown as pages within panels; this is a narrative trope never used when the two creators collaborated, and is indicative of a shift towards a strip privileging dialogue and narrative over visuality and image-making.

From this point until 1987 Collins' contribution to the strip decreases by degrees and the artwork he produces on those intermittent occasions is looser and far more simplistic. Through 1982 Dodd incrementally gets to grips with the various sub-divisions of the strip's narratives, at one stage drawing a sequence with the beetles with what appears to be Collins drawing the characters, and then a holiday sequence where Collins draws the figures with Dodd drawing backgrounds.

By 1983 Dodd and Collins are alternating week-by-week until midway through the year when Dodd begins to sign the strips he produces and Collins' input diminishes further. Over the next few years Collins returns only for the lengthy 'Eyeballs' sequences, which he begins to sign to make clear his contributions. After caring for wife Gwen for some years, he also became ill. Dr Judy Collins attests that 'If my father hadn't been ill he would have gone on. He would. That's what stopped him.'[45]

With Collins' departure the strip becomes a very different property and not pertinent to the focus of this study.

[45] Interview with Dr Judy Collins, 2012

Chapter Six: Practice - *The Scruffy Herberts* (2008-2016)

The practice-based element of my PhD is a new body of artwork called *The Scruffy Herberts*. Where the starting point of previous projects was the American comic book format in *Nine Panel Grid*, the children's illustrated narrative in *The Adventures of Lionel* and the editorial cartoon in *Wilf – A Life In Pictures*, the *Scruffy Herberts* artwork began with research into *The Perishers* and adopts the form of the traditional newspaper comic strip. The resultant body of work marks a resolution point of the ideas discussed in the thesis around collection, mimesis, pastiche and adaptation.

I chose the source material of *The Perishers* for its various contexts as a pastiche of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts*, its personal significance as an adolescent reading retreat, and its history as a record of a writer and illustrator responding to social and cultural change through four decades of British post-war history. This body of work is therefore in parts homage, parody, analysis and meta-narrative. It takes *The Perishers*' status as a 'British *Peanuts*' as a starting point and conflates my knowledge of both series' history to make a creative reimagining of a 'Pyman-ish *Perishers*'.

I adopted the method of parody to examine *The Perishers* and related this to my own practice and process to produce *The Scruffy Herberts*. Parody contains many elements to consider, including appropriation, critique, deconstruction, humour, imitation, irony, meta-fiction, pastiche and satire. The process of parodically appropriating cultural source material for critical examination is an established fine art practice to facilitate the generating of new artwork, and Michael Taussig has said of this approach that 'parody is where mimicry exposes construction.'[1]

The intention of *The Scruffy Herberts* art work is to enable new insights into the historical and cultural framework that informs the creative process. The resultant writing and drawing is a body of art work that mimics vernacular forms of dissemination such as original daily newspaper comic strips, book collection covers, animation stills and other ephemera spanning the time period 1950-2000. This conflation of analysis and pastiche is central to the process as my own practice is not exclusively bound by a fixed stylistic approach. Rather, the aesthetic of a project is contingent on researching the subject's precedents, cultural influences and biographical framework. It is the creative negotiation with these formative influences that determine the appearance of the finished artwork as much as personal aesthetics. It is worth

[1] Taussig, *Mimesis & Alterity*, p. 69.

noting that *The Perishers* has not previously been critically investigated using this methodology of creatively responding from a practice-based perspective.

My artistic practice incorporates image-making from both comics production and fine art. Although the two activities are distinct modes in terms of both visual and conceptual approaches and presentational contexts, they share social and cultural sources in terms of themes, material and formal concerns.

In my gallery practice drawings are constructed from self-generated, sourced and found images that are combined to make exhibitions where groups of individual artworks form different narrative relationships depending on various configurations. Fine artists using a similar approach would include Raymond Pettibon and Jim Shaw, who incorporate drawings of American iconic comic characters such as Superman, Batman and Gumby as part of a broader visual lexicon of cultural properties that are synthesised into an installation-based practice.

In my publications such as *Nine Panel Grid* and *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* there is a linear narrative structure that echoes conventional formats like the comic book, illustrated biography and anthology. While these works examine visual languages and conceptual practice as in my fine art practice, they also address historical and formal aspects of comics publishing. Current practitioners working in a comparable manner would include Art Spiegelman, Robert Sikoryak and specifically Chris Ware. Ware has for the last 25 years been a highly significant alternative comics artist. His ongoing *Acme Novelty Library* series combines novelistic, semi-autobiographical narratives with densely layered pastiches of newspaper strips and Golden Age superhero comics. Ware draws on American Sunday newspaper colour strips, especially Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*, a quiet, melancholic story of blue-collar folk, and the hallucinatory fantasy of Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. Ware borrows King's oversized page format and colour palette and McCay's architectural design and physical scale for his own strips *Big Tex* and *Rocket Sam*. These pastiches of form, content and style are then relocated historically into the present to reflect on the social and political context of the original material.

In summary, my fine art gallery practice draws on broad cultural and historical sources (music and comics culture, politics, literature and folklore) similarly to Pettibon, while my publications are analogous to Ware's approach in examining comics history to create contemporary artworks that quote and cite historical and formal precedents.

American fine artists such as Pettibon, Shaw, Kerry James Marshall and Mike Kelley have all referenced comics culture in the last 25 years, and more recently British artists such as Adam

Dant, Olivia Plender and David Shrigley have also adopted aspects of comics culture in their work. Although these artists have variously reflected on aspects of superhero and genre comics, educational and tract comics and political and 'gag' cartooning, they have not addressed the specific distinctive visual language embodied by newspaper strips that my research examines.

Instead, the contemporary conceptual and creative context for the *Scruffy Herberts* work is in publications from a number of North American cartoonists who since the 1990s have also drawn on the history of newspaper comic strips for inspiration. These include Chester Brown who acknowledges the strong stylistic influence of Harold Gray's strip *Little Orphan Annie* in his graphic novels *Paying for It* and *Louis Riel*, and Daniel Clowes who cites *Peanuts* and Ernie Bushmiller's *Nancy* as exemplars of the form. Clowes' *Eightball* comic features numerous fictional one-off newspaper comics, and his graphic novel *Ice Haven* (2005) is structured as a series of half-page Sunday strips that play with genres and graphic languages. Canadian cartoonist Seth produces fictional biographies of comic collecting societies that ironise the archiving mentality, and cartoonist Tony Millionaire's syndicated *Maakies* newspaper strip exploits a pseudo-archaic linguistic and visual style to effect 'the look of a combination between the '20s and the early '60s, the underground comics.'[2]

In the same way that these cartoonists cite and deploy their own formative reading experiences, I used *The Perishers* as a niche influence in terms of its format, development, and indebtedness to *Peanuts*. The decision to choose *The Perishers* was driven by a number of factors; firstly, its resonance for me personally; secondly, its unusual nature within British newspaper comic strips; and principally its absence of critical acknowledgement as a cultural artifact.

Old *Perishers* books still carried a powerful 'charge' as objects for me. Looking at them returned me imaginatively to 1972. Reading them reminded me of the specific times and particular places I had bought them. The beginning of the PhD research period coincided with my mother becoming seriously ill which necessitated repeated visits from London to my costal hometown Eastbourne. I became aware through conversations with childhood friends during this period how unusually intense my emotional connection to the seaside town remained relative to my peers. It occurred to me that the fictional narrative strand that had run through my lifelong comics reading had also shaped an unbroken conceptual and contextual link through my artwork. Maintaining parallel but distinct interests in fine art practice and comics culture had

[2] Interview with Tony Millionaire by Stephen Lemons, http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/blogs/monster-interview-with-tony-millionaire-creator-of-the-maakies-comic-strip-6500485 (Accessed 29 June 2016).

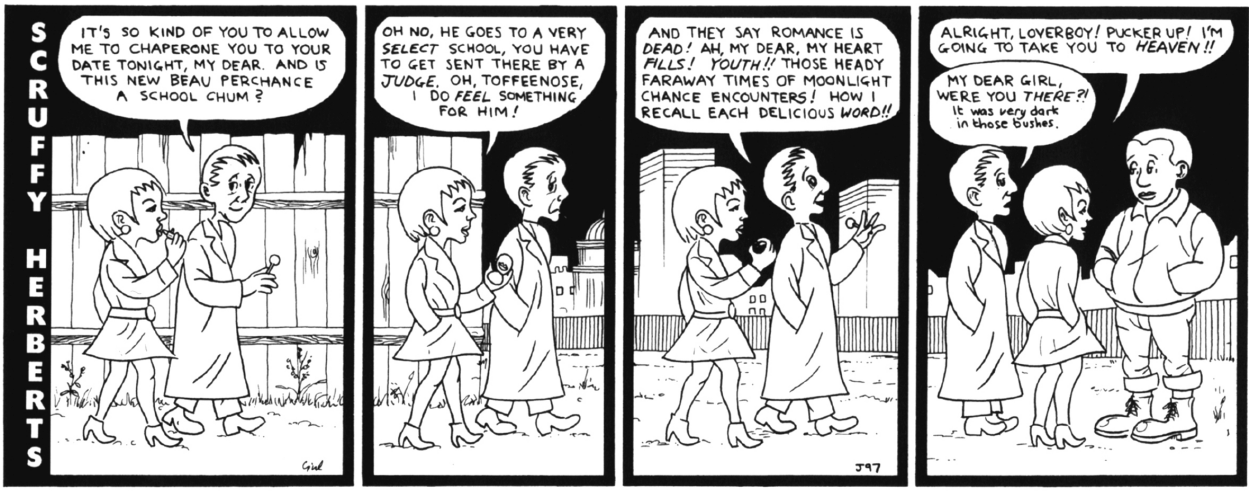
mutually informed each strand of interest. It was this overlap that would provide the conceptual framework for the *Scruffy Herberts* project.

Secondly, the formal characteristics of *The Perishers* seemed a potential source for study. The strip contained elements of both conventional humour or 'gag' cartoons and a soap-opera or continuity strip, usually two very distinct forms. While there is always a punchline or pay-off in each daily episode, story arcs can develop over weeks and sometimes months, so following the ongoing narrative structure is sometimes difficult, but is also employed as a source of accreting humour as stories grow and develop. A complete understanding of the strip is predicated on consistent daily reading, and missing an episode means possibly missing a critical part of the story. I felt this could be exploited; where *Wilf* cartoons were self-contained investigations of global or national events relocated to domestic incidents, the fabric of *The Perishers* as an ongoing comedic narrative could be part of *The Scruffy Herberts*. Incidents and occurrences could be referred to in strips that had never been made, characters could be mentioned but not seen, and years of continuity could be implied but never depicted or actually even exist.

This leads directly to its lack of historical acknowledgement. Not only has there been little to no consideration of the strip, but to examine it again with the knowledge of that lack creates a layering of a particular sensibility. *The Perishers* had a consistent quality of melancholy in its tone which re-reading with the knowledge of its cultural invisibility only emphasised. Often characters reminisce, recall and lament within the strip, mostly to comic effect but also to deliberately articulate Dodd and Collins' sensibilities and perspectives. Although discussed mostly as a *Peanuts* pastiche, *The Perishers*' concerns were directly connected to current events, politics, and specific aspects of pop-culture peculiar to Britain. *Peanuts* would not mention other cartoons, pop groups or TV programmes, instead focusing on childrens' perceptions of various psychoanalytical, ontological and theological belief systems. In contrast, *The Perishers* cited socio-political and pop-cultural phenomena that were then considered and discussed within their own child-world. *The Perishers* built up a long-running portrait of a culture in transition through an examination of folk customs, shifting popular trends and the changing English urban and rural landscape. Inevitably looking back was a key aspect of this process, as much of the strip's ironic humour lay in small children wistfully recalling the past and being trepidatious of the future.

A prototype version of *The Scruffy Herberts* had already appeared in *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* where the titular cartoonist knew colleagues who also produced comic strips and cartoons.

Within this context it functioned as a broad pastiche, an example of a much more cartoonish property as distinct from Wilf's editorial illustration style.



'Toffeenose' and 'Acid Drops' from a 1972 'Scruffy Herberts' strip which also marked the first appearance of 'Skin 'Ed'.

Fig 6.1 James Pyman, *Scruffy Herberts*, from *Wilf – A Life In Pictures* (p. 64), 20 x 25cm, pub. 2004

Revisiting this work, the characters seemed too teenage and mature relative to *The Perishers* and the child-world I wanted to examine. The aesthetic of the work also seemed somehow inauthentic, an overly graphic version with little visual warmth. However, although initially conceived of simply as 'texture', and even though the characters' names often merely expressed one-dimensional character traits such as Toffeenose, Acid Drops and Little Els, this shorthand lent itself to interpretation and development.

Where the *Wilf* work examined political cartoon content aimed at an adult audience, *The Perishers*' audience was less defined. Although ostensibly resembling a British childrens' comic in the vein of the 'Bash Street Kids,' the strip actually had little of interest to children. The language, concerns and humour were concerned with childhood, but were perceived from the perspective of adulthood. Therefore, the *Scruffy Herberts* artwork could examine a supposed 'all-ages' context for material, and examine the notion that anyone could read the strip but that different interpretations or readings were available to various audiences. It was this layering that was most challenging in the work; finding a superficially similar but actually distinct voice, both verbally and visually, from *The Perishers* while still retaining strong enough echoes to locate, however distantly, the source.

With close reading and re-reading a sense of the input from both *Perishers* creators could be discerned. Dodd's textual contributions would figure more strongly within certain storylines while more imagistic or illustrative strips would seem to be driven by Collin's visual interests.

However, this was not always rigorously demarcated, and the strip was an ever-shifting balance of linguistic play and imagistic experimentation which gave the strip a distinctive rhythm and tension. The drawing, although initially visually kinetic, settled into an understated, visually-rich and technically-assured mode distinct from any other British newspaper strip.

The Perishers was not the only British strip indebted to *Peanuts*. Through my research I found a strip called *Benny* published in the 'Daily Herald' in 1961. It is not simply inspired by *Peanuts*; the strip is a total impersonation of Schulz's visual style, character design, landscape and even lettering. The only significant difference is the specifically British subject matter, which is flat-racing at Newmarket and its punning relation to the lack of post-war housing stock - not a normal topic for a *Peanuts* cartoon!



Fig 6.2 *Benny*, 'Droc' (Derek Chittock), 'Daily Herald', c. 1961

However, the attempt to transpose *Peanuts* for a domestic audience was a valuable example of how social and cultural re-siting could create some strange, unreal hybrid form. *Benny* felt as if Schulz had been asked to reimagine *The Perishers*, and the result revealed how implausible and unconvincing such as attempt might be. It was reminiscent of the newspaper strip pastiches in *Mad* Magazine, but interposed into an authentic, real-world context.

As with the *Wilf* style, there was a period of many months where I sketched, considered and rejected possible designs and visual re-readings to create the look of *The Scruffy Herberts.* The inherent challenge with pastiching and parodying source material is the balance between overt referencing and origination, and this negotiation is documented through the working and

sketchbook material itself as a series of developmental stages. *The Scruffy Herberts* drew on numerous personal influences while consciously and deliberately attempting to avoid overtly mimicking the Collins style. Visual precedents were *Peanuts* and the other newspaper strips of the period together with a combination of personal childhood influences such as British cartoonists John Tenniel, E H Shepard, Norman Thelwell and Leo Baxendale, and adolescent American comics influences such as George Perez, Mike Ploog and Russ Heath. Between these groups of artists I developed a look and a style I considered explicitly authentic while implicitly constructed from many sources. The work exposes the gap between these sources and also activates issues relating to memory and making.

My initial work stemmed from shaky assumptions based on a personal view and visual information. I knew little about the work's intentions. As my research has revealed new dimensions of this work, shifting its shape and its meaning, my own iteration also alters its meaning, raising questions about the impregnation of modern sensibilities in any reconstruction and also about whether such mimetic representation can extend beyond a personally inflected enquiry.



Fig 6.3 James Pyman, The first *Scruffy 'Erbert* strip, 2015

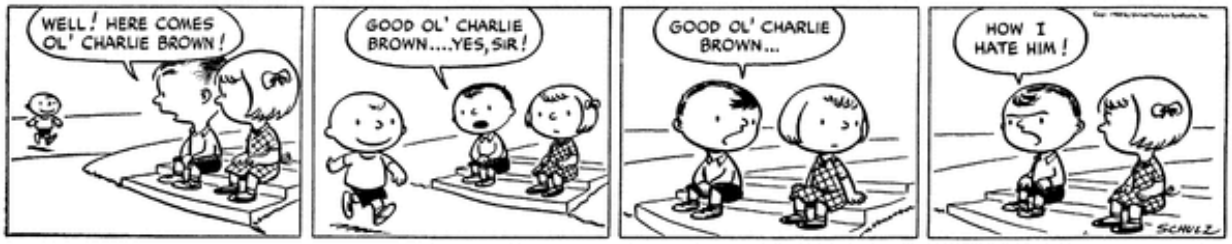


Fig 6.4 The first *Peanuts* strip, Charles M Schulz, 2nd October 1950

Taking a starting date of 1955, I began the fictional strip as *Scruffy 'Erbert* with just the character of the titular street urchin. I borrowed the crooked arrow from the first *Perishers* strip and the passing of Charlie Brown through the space of the first *Peanuts* strip as starting points and conflated them to produce the structure of the introductory strip. This scene-set some of the *Perishers* formal attributes and tropes to be borrowed such as the 'polyptych' composition and thick panel borders with my own textual and visual decisions regarding dialogue, character

design and illustrative milieu. This was the point where the parody or pastiche was balanced with a biographical understanding of vernacular forms rooted in close reading and appropriate awareness of the media. Richard Sennett has written of the hermeneutic process that

> Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding.[3]

Subsequent strips showed 'Erbert's prefab home, the acquisition of his pet dog Barker and the introduction of other characters. Strip scenarios revolved around quotidian social developments and contexts such as parking meters, coffee bars, playground politics and scrumping.

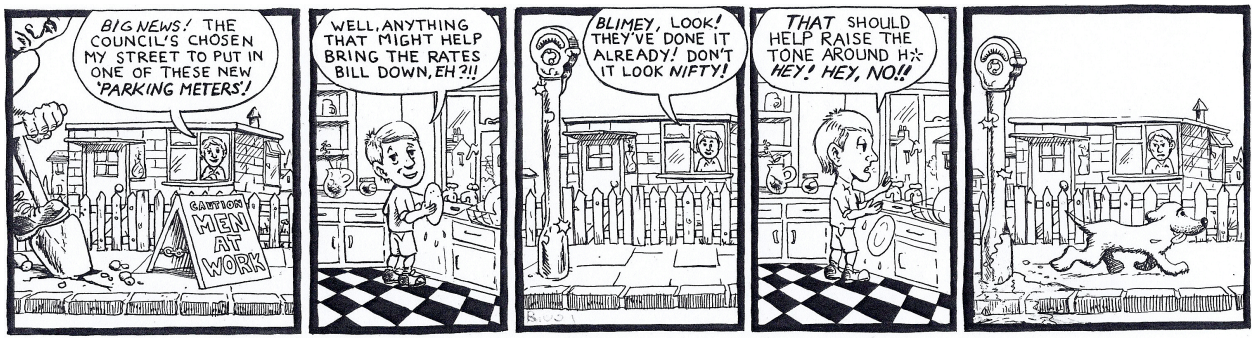


Fig 6.5 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts*, 2014

As with the *Wilf* book, the project took shape as an historical overview of the strip. Establishing a potential group of subjects in each year, I narrowed these down to key socio-cultural events to build strips around. Similarly to the Giles cartoons, I attempted to avoid subjects or themes already addressed in *The Perishers*. This proved harder with *The Scruffy Herberts*, as the source was a detailed lexicon of clear childhood concerns such as parties, games, school and play. Instead I opted to represent their experiences chiefly in relation to pop-cultural events or more adult social circumstances, The humour often lay in emphasising their childhood experiences in the adult world as 'fish out of water.' As Simon Critchley has noted:

> Jokes tear holes in our usual predictions about the empirical world. We might say that humour is produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented in the joke, between expectation and actuality. Humour defeats our expectations by producing a novel actuality, by changing the situation in which we find ourselves.[4]

[3] Sennet, *The Craftsman*, p. 9.
[4] Critchley, *On Humour*, p. 1.

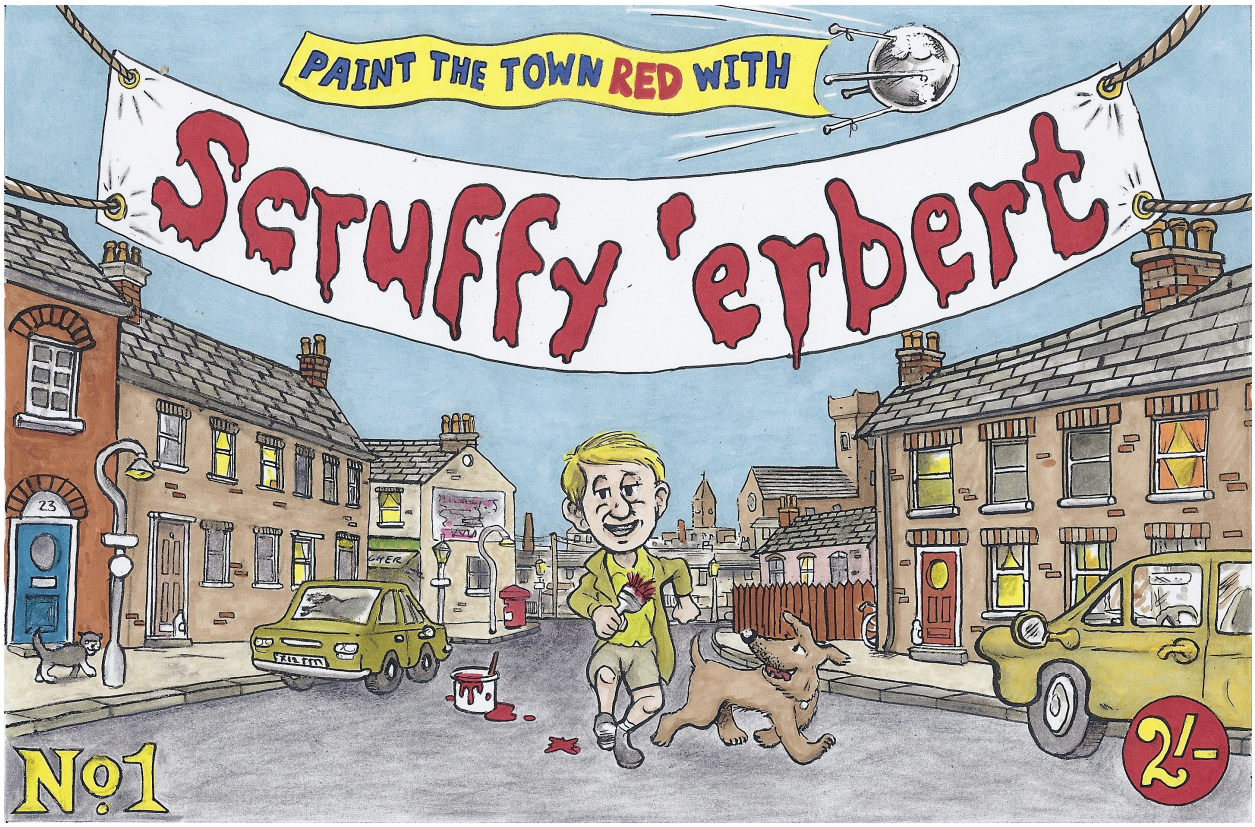


Fig 6.6 James Pyman, *Scruffy 'Erbert* No. 1, 2015-16

In 1957 the first fictional collection is published collating the previous two years of notional strips. This 1950s 'look' is robust, organic form in a thick ink-drawn style with flat, murky colour and a smudged grisaille texture, the style and palette borrowed from visual approaches from contemporaneous British comic books such as *Film Fun*, *The Dandy* and *Cor!*. The images are simultaneously executed in an archaic representational mode while also incorporating the appropriately aged texture of an artifact of the period, as if the image content and historical context were synthesized and the image itself had been 'made old'. Equally, the strips from the 1960s and 1970s also reflect stylistic shifts in illustrative language.

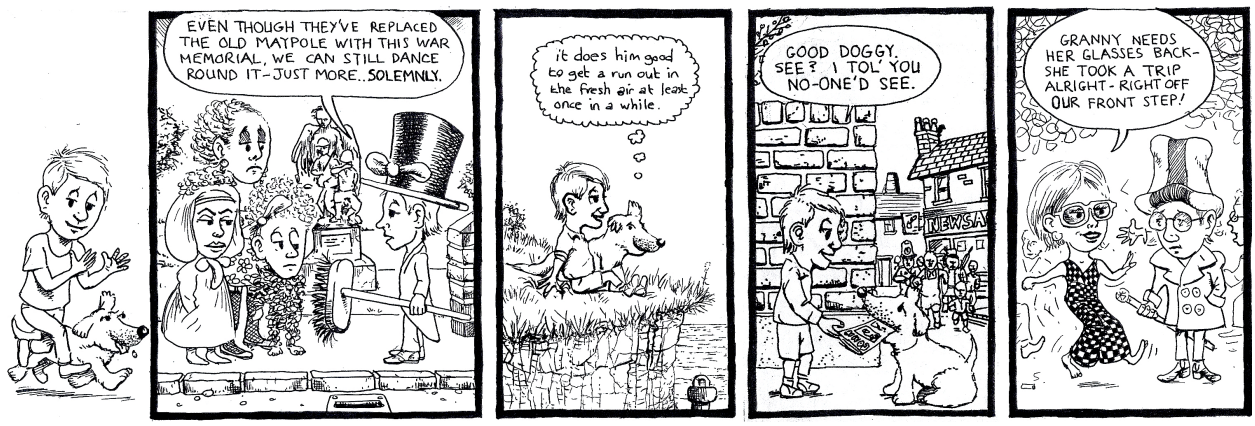


Fig 6.7 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts* (p. 5), 2016

These styles and techniques are combined in the opening, introductory pages for the collection. The middle two panels in the strip above are executed in the same roughly-inked and rounded style as the first cover, while bookended by strips from later periods, and this juxtaposition emphasizes the notional duration of the fictional strip.

In the fiction of the work the newspaper strip *Scruffy 'Erbert* continues until a proliferation of other characters necessitates a name change to *The Scruffy Herberts* as Herbert is not featured in every daily strip. Each of these characters conforms to the general format and broad dynamic as *The Perishers*, *Peanuts* and other personae in the archetypical 'kid gang', typified by the leader, then his or her lieutenant, the tomboy, more feminine girl, weed or weakling, boffin, and tough lad. Domestic examples were in 1960s TV programmes like 'The Double Deckers' and 'Please Sir!' and comics like 'The Bash St Kids' and 'Lord Snooty and His Pals'.

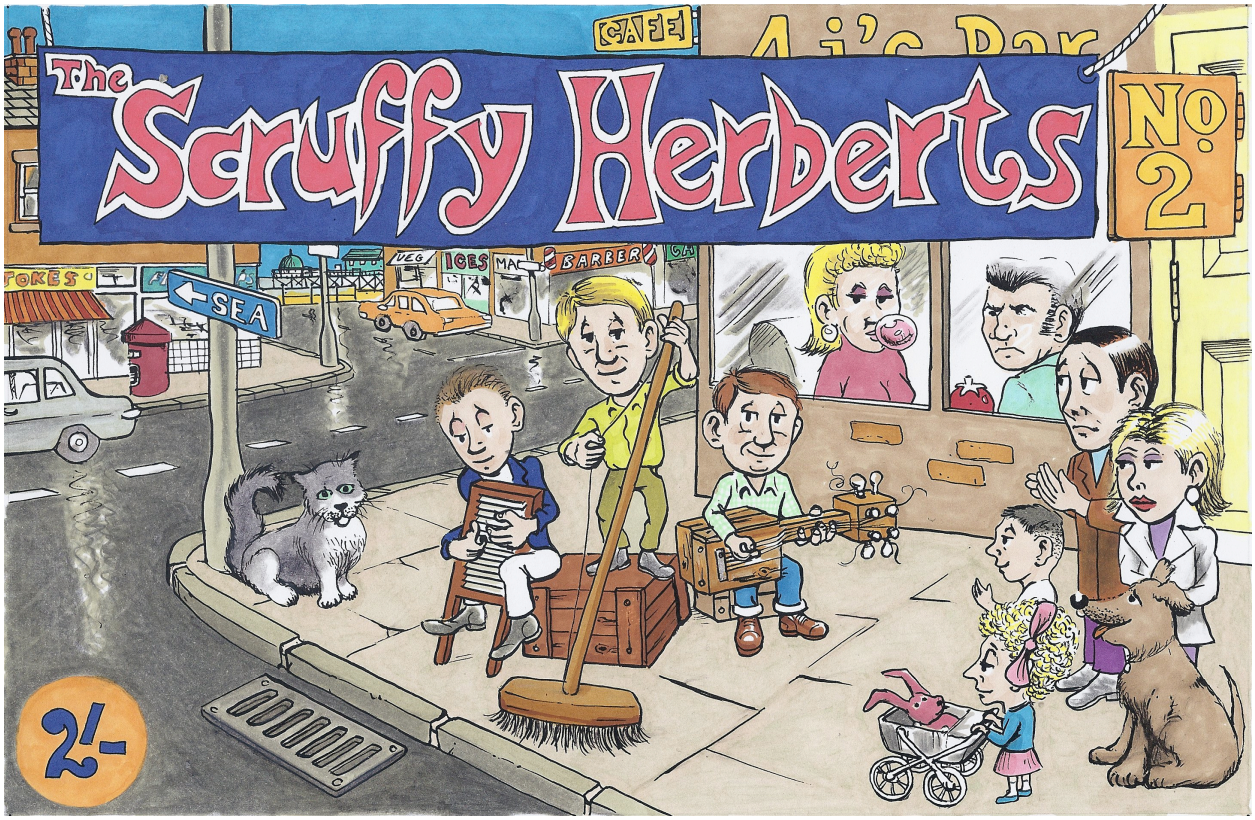


Fig 6.8 James Pyman, The *Scruffy Herberts No. 2*, 2014-16

The work is made with the hindsight that can articulate and reflect on aspects of politics, society and culture. Within the developing narrative of British history, the Notting Hill race riots of 1958 prompt the introduction of Dennis into the strip, a young black boy who becomes the equivalent of Marlon to Herbert's Wellington. In the same way that Wellington moves into a Lord Beeching-closed railway station in 1963 in *The Perishers*, Dennis moves into a men's

public toilets due to no private housing being available for immigrant communities like Jamaicans and Irish. This new home is already 'squatted' by character Toffeenose, whose persona is a mild camp caricature in the vein of a young Kenneth Williams. Other characters are 'Acid Drops' who is a hybrid of Maisie and Lucy van Pelt filtered through a mod-girl sensibility familiar from films like 'Up the Junction'; Precious Little Els, the mute character whose name matches her verbal non-contribution to the strip; and Bunches, Dennis' tomboy little sister. A little boy, inevitably called Tich, communicates in 'anguish languish', a phonetic form where, for example, 'enunciation' would be written as 'a nun see Asian'. When Herbert finally moves out of his prefab into an ex-council house he moves into a 'one-up one-down' and is no better off. The strips examine changing social and cultural phenomenon through the perceptions of a group of characters who never age. The intention is to give the reader a sense of years passing comprised of occasional glimpses of a continuous, soap-opera narrative. The presence of black and implicitly gay characters is at odds with *The Perishers*, whose sole representative of ethnicity was the Indian bloodhound BH Calcutta (Failed). Although *The Perishers* was of its time, and the *Herberts* characters were made for *Wilf* with no great degree of consideration of further development at the time, these different ethnic and social contexts offered scope for new narrative and visual approaches.

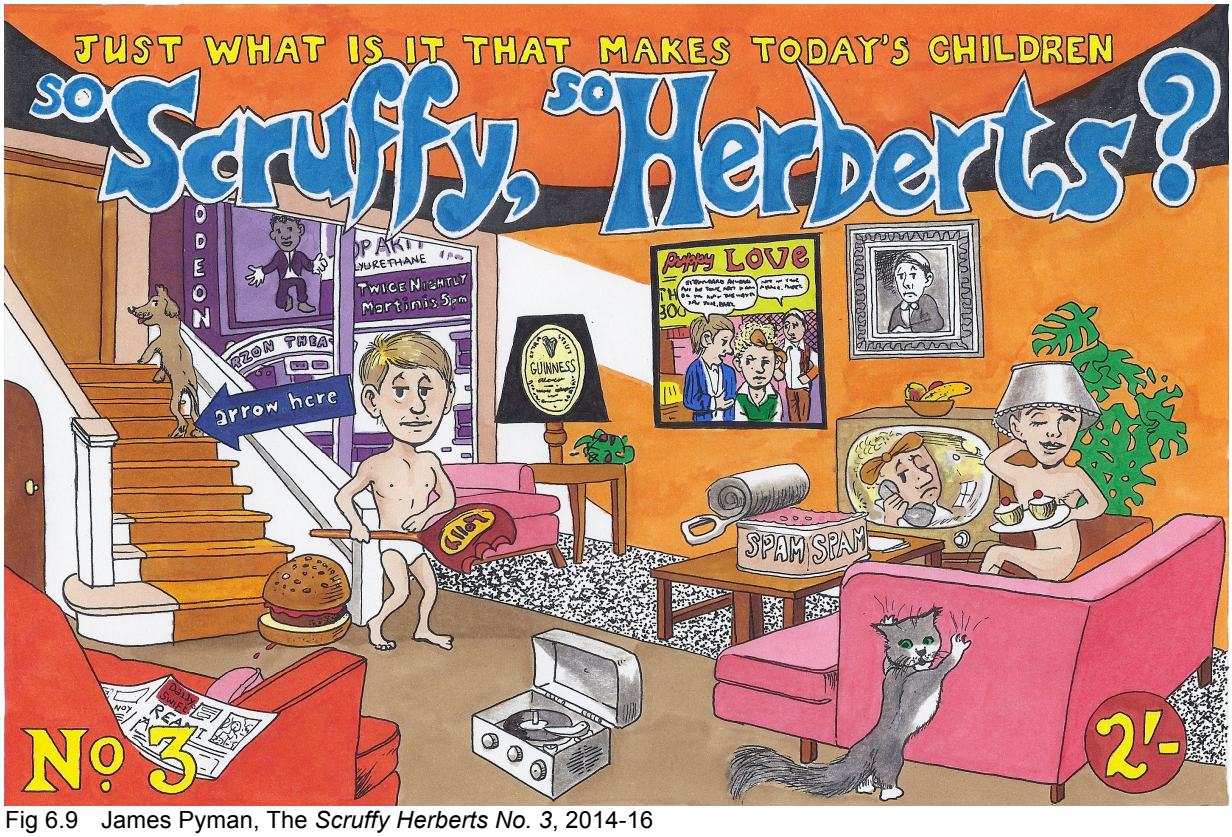


Fig 6.9 James Pyman, The *Scruffy Herberts No. 3*, 2014-16

The 1958 Annual cover is a reworking of Richard Hamilton's 'Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing.' The Dennis character replaces a 'blackface' Al Jolson, a portable record player replaces the original reel-to-reel tape deck, and a hamburger replaces the 1950s vacuum cleaner at the foot of the stairs. The strip's resident cat is clawing the suburban dream sofa, and Acid Drops' tray of cherry-topped Bakewell tarts have replaced the nipples of the woman in the original collage.

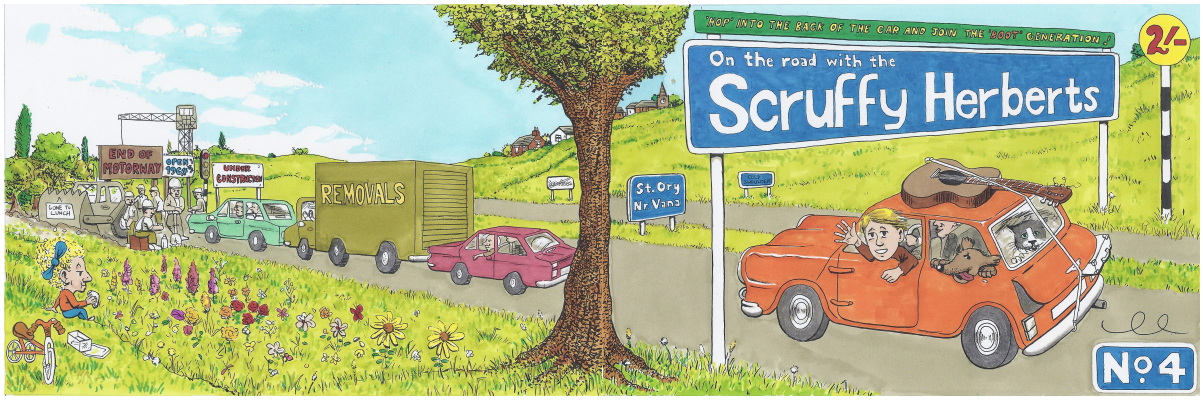


Fig 6.10 James Pyman, The *Scruffy Herberts No. 4*, 2015-16

The 1959 annual cover conflates the opening of the first phase of the M1 motorway and the publication of Jack Kerouac's 'On The Road' novel and borrows the landscape format of *The Perishers* annual collections, where often the front cover scene would be undercut or overturned by a detail on the back cover. Here the optimistic proto-Beatniks Herbert and Dennis are about to drive into the back of the M1's inaugural traffic jam.

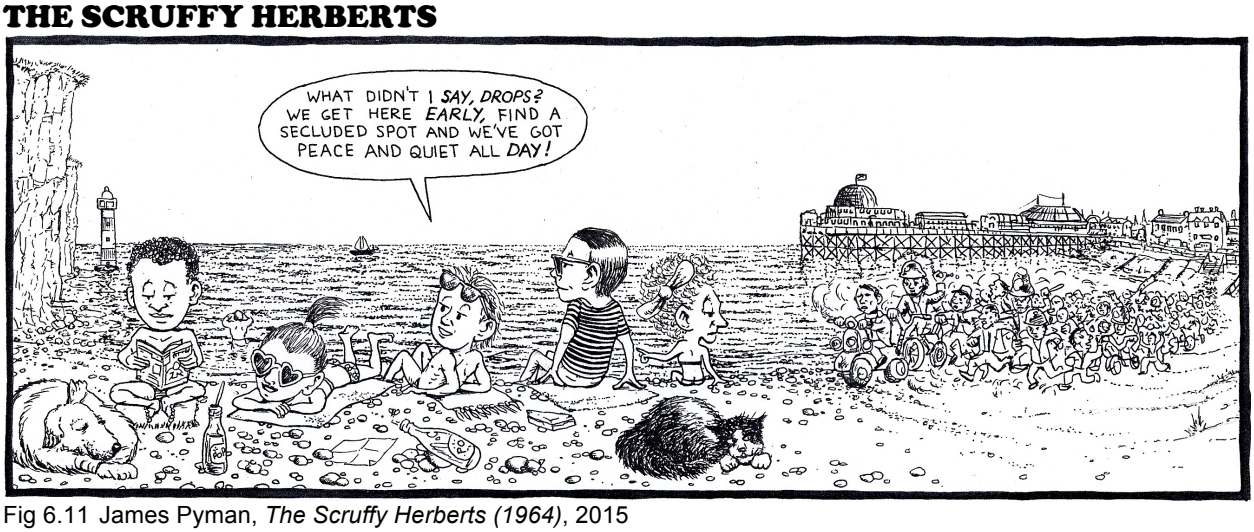


Fig 6.11 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts (1964)*, 2015

This 1964-set strip shows mods and rockers descending onto a beach where the Herberts are relaxing. In essence this is more of a political cartoon in that it is a single image and a interdependent combination of the verbal and the visual. The image reads from left to right, so

that Herbert's observation of the tranquility of the scene is superseded by the visual melee of the descending crowd.

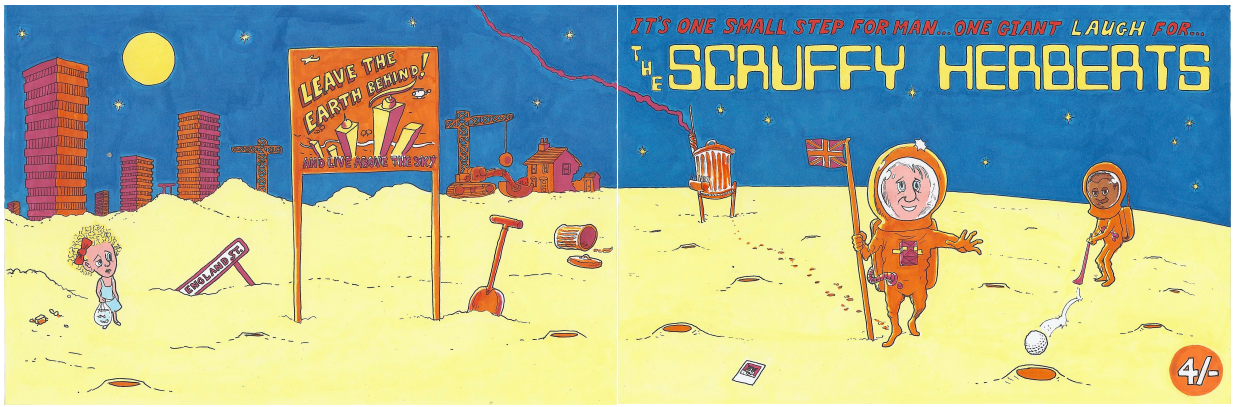


Fig 6.12 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts, 1969 Annual*, 2012

The images made for the annual collection covers represent both global and domestic events simultaneously. The 1969 annual initially appears to be a moonwalk, but is revealed on the back cover to be the wasteground created by slum clearance and new social housing development. The 1973 cover conflates the visual stylings of 'glam rock' with the simultaneous resurgence of interest in 'folk' customs such as Morris dancing and agrarianism as aspects of the eco-movement, while the 1978 annual cover shows the cast relaxing on their hometown of Sandsend's new nudist beach.

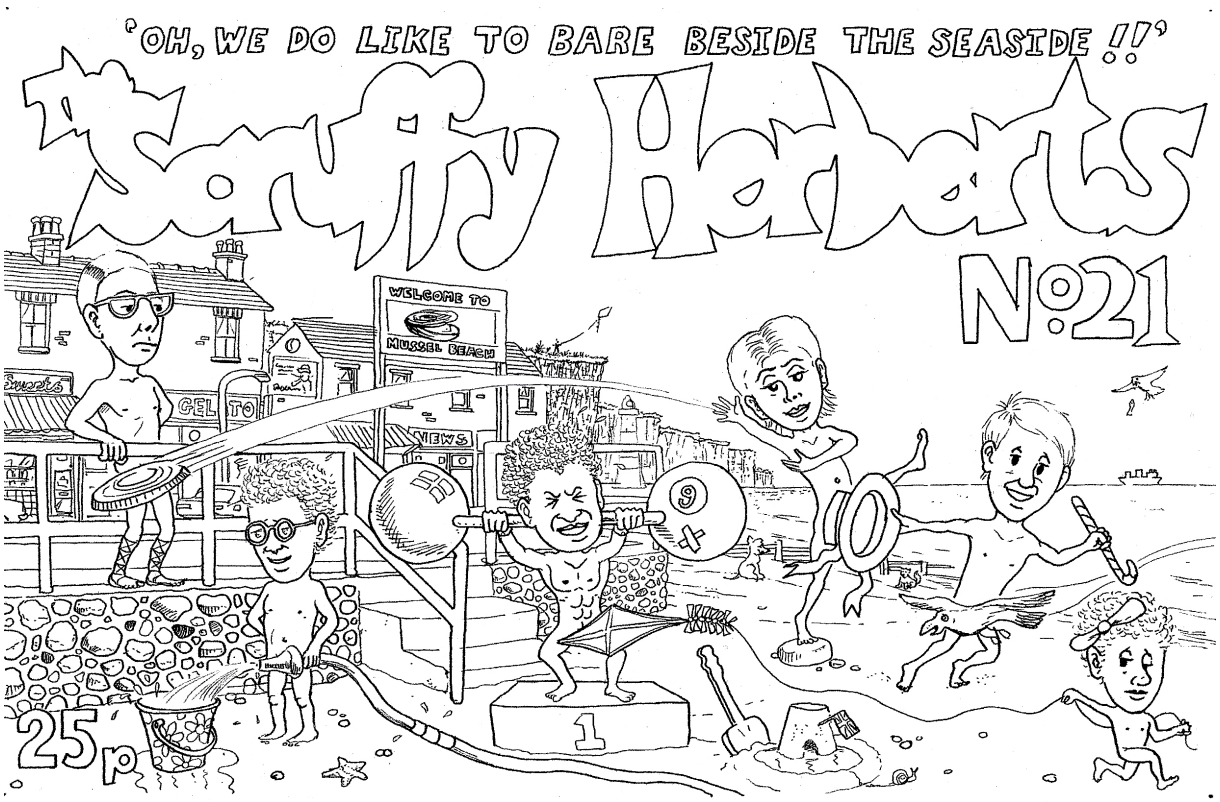


Fig 6.13 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts No. 21*, 2016

Considering how to present the work has been challenging. I felt the *Wilf* book was not fully realised because it was not 'believable' enough as an object. This was due to particular errors of decision: the *Wilf* cover was too understated, and was used for what I considered its atmospheric quality rather than any humorous impact. This set an unrepresentative tone for what was meant to be a humorous cartoon collection. Eventually I produced a *Scruffy Herberts* publication that resembled some combination of a retrospective and an annual collection, perhaps for a fictional cartoon gallery show or an auction catalogue. However, I also retained an element of contingency about the book's status. The *viva* exhibition will contain all the original hand-drawn cartoon strips and ephemera as a portfolio together with supporting material, and consideration will be given to future presentational possibilities.

The principal question in the *Scruffy Herberts* work concerned the balance of pastiche to originality. In the *Wilf* book, visual consistency was not a concern of the editorial cartoon as to a large extent the illustrative techniques were driven by the subject. I was relatively free to adopt any style, technique or device and rationalize this approach as in keeping with the period or content of the cartoon. However, the *Scruffy Herberts* necessitated a visual consistency to create the sense of an ongoing soap-opera narrative, and this visual consistency had to be original while still indebted to *The Perishers*.

The fundamental questions raised by practices of parody and appropriation are whether the work convinces as an artifact, and how does it move beyond pastiche to become an autonomous art work? As Taussig has expressed this concern:

> A question then arises … – from mimesis to the organized control of mimesis – as to whether the mimetic faculty can escape this fate of being used against itself, whether it could be used against being used against itself? Can parody supply an answer?[5]

Self evidently presentational context, peer review and critical validation provide some answer to any work's success, but I believe the success or failure of the work is in its commitment to a personal vision, its immersive quality and its verisimilitude. This can be achieved through sheer quantity of output functioning as testament to a commitment to the vision of the project and echoing the durational investment of the source. When the work is overwhelming in its detail the viewer is more likely to believe in the construct. The constructed verisimilitude can also be achieved through an acuity and intensity of examination brought to bear on both the source subject and the fictional outcome.

[5] Taussig, *Mimesis & Alterity*, p. 68-69.

Ultimately the *Scruffy Herberts* work has become another art work in a career of projects that have circled around ideas of memory; recalling the first time I saw *The Perishers*, reading and re-reading and recalling, the making and then remaking of memory. When shown adjacent to or considered alongside my other art works, the different projects form a network where knowledge of one influences the comprehension of another, forming a bridge to connect cultural history and contemporary practice to build cultural meaning.

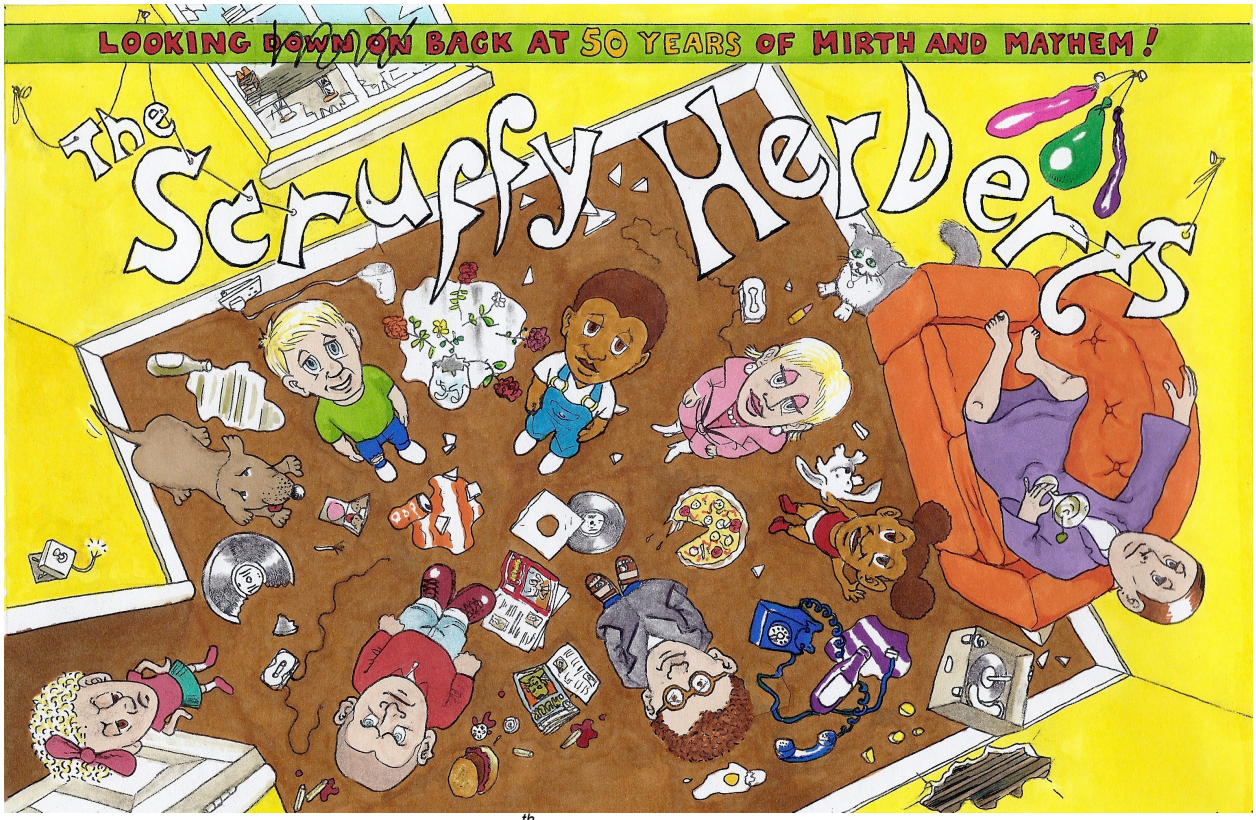


Fig 6.14 James Pyman, *The Scruffy Herberts 50th Anniversary Collection*, 2016

The cover to *The Scruffy Herberts* compilation depicts the characters in a demolished room, apparently after a party. This was the last page made for the book. The notional publication date is 2000, the 50-year anniversary of the strip's publication. The children are looking up at the reader, gazing up at the 'Eyeballs In The Sky.'

Conclusion

The starting point for this research was the history and development of *The Perishers* newspaper strip and its place in the context of my own practice. Initiated by the absence of extant research material, investigation into *The Perishers* led me to a large group of other 'Daily Mirror' strips that shared their origins as being borrowed from, inspired by or directly copied from another American model. Over time all of these domestic properties had metamorphosed or developed into unique properties with distinct social and cultural concerns. Throughout the journey of the research I have used close reading of the *Perishers* material to focus on small details and observations within the strip and considered these in the light of my own experience and the wider world. This thesis mixes the observation and visual analysis of *The Perishers* strips with ruminations on the creators' processes and my own methods of writing and drawing. Memory has emerged as a central motif as the comics under discussion, provoking recollections of my own childhood, the place of autobiography in my work and that of Dodd and Collins, and the use of historical material to generate contemporary art works.

Outputs and Outcomes

The research enquiry is embodied in the final forms of practice-based works that have applied visual, historical and written material to the creation of new artifacts. Research outputs were the result of dialogues between different research activities such as drawing, interviews, reflective and analytical writing and collation of reference material. Outputs emerged as a result of reflection on the research, often manifested in different ways (conceptually, materially, visually and textually). Throughout the study drawing was used as a way of distilling the material, to visualise and analyse information and to analyse the properties and qualities of newspaper strips.

The research produced several interrelated outputs outlined in the following summaries. A number of these have been disseminated during the PhD and these are summarised in Appendix Four. Where a contribution to knowledge is proposed, I have noted it in connection with a related outcome.

1. Historical Context: the examination and collation of the over-looked

Rather than simply reviewing a pre-existing body of knowledge and reconsidering it within a pedagogical framework, this research is a new consideration and contextualising of a large amount of hitherto-unseen material.

After revisiting my own comics collection I researched the whole history of British newspaper strips, and specifically the 'Daily Mirror' regarding its editorial development and as a site for newspaper strip commissioning and experimentation. This research synthesised material from many disparate sources and provided an opportunity to consolidate this information into a specific framework and timeline. Although this collection was initially designed as a model of production for my own practice, this material can be utilised more widely as a scholarly resource.

2. New Archival Material

Having ascertained the limited amount of extant British material relating to newspaper comic strips, my research necessitated recapitulating the American model of collation, re-reprinting and critique as the template for my research and study. I collated all existing *Perishers* book collections from 1963-1990 together with a large number of other cartoon collections and relevant ephemera. I sourced all 1,000 'Daily Mirror' *Perishers* strips never reprinted in the annual collections from the British Newspaper Library digital archive, organized them chronologically, and obtained much general supporting and anecdotal material around the strip in order to reflect on and respond to the absence of domestic appraisal. The archive of this material represents another contribution that narrows the gap and importantly provides a resource for further academic study that could be used by a broad audience within academia: practitioners and practitioner-researchers, visual arts and humanities scholars.

As well as constructing an archive of all *The Perishers* strips I conducted interviews with Mike Dodd and Dr Judy Collins to produce biographies of the creators and these have produced new insights into their fathers' histories and working processes. This material has been combined into a 100-page draft publication (*The Perishers Missing Strips*) that contributes to the biographical and contextual understanding of the work of Dodd and Collins and will form part of the *viva* exhibition. This strand of research emphasises the personalities of the authors as much as their making processes to consider how different levels of knowledge bear upon an understanding of the source.

The Perishers Missing Strips publication includes a small selection of the 1,000 *Perishers* strips downloaded from the British Newspaper Library online archive. The publication currently has low-resolution digital copies but my intention is to initiate further research in liaison with the 'Daily Mirror' and the British Newspaper Library to obtain high-quality scans of all the original newspaper strip pages. This would retrieve a significant amount of other material as well as

provide the potential for anthologising many other unpublished strips. This aspect of doctoral research will be developed further by collecting all the 'Daily Mirror' strips in a reprint anthology format similar to current American publishers IDW and Fantagraphics to create a research library as a print and digital resource.

The collation of this material has also enabled me to produce and apply innovative pedagogic material for teaching, curriculum development and further academic study. The database and archive built to develop this research has broader potential as a pedagogical tool for future researchers.

3. Writing, collecting, ordering, re-ordering

Writing about these works has been a significant site of reflective practice as valuable ideas, thoughts and methods have emerged through the process. In an odd way I have been both the researcher and the subject of the research as I have reflected on episodes in *The Perishers* that have paralleled events in my life that have led to responses, actions and content in my work. Reflection has enabled me to draw out skills and knowledge embedded in the activity of my process that I didn't know I had. Working in this way has also enabled me to perceive ways of building on the understandings gained, sharing models of process through teaching and also through the dissemination of my practice-based research in exhibitions and publications.

4. Making as pastiche through close reading: *The Scruffy Herberts*

At the outset of the study two objectives focussed on the development of my own work as an artist. Primarily I sought to critically appraise *The Perishers* by applying my own art practice as a research method. This has taken the form of a new body of work entitled *The Scruffy Herberts*. I have collated some of this artwork into a 38-page publication (Appendix Five) mimicking the form of a reprint collection, and a more fully-realised version for publication would be the focus of post-doctoral practice.

The Scruffy Herberts uses pastiche as a critical tool that can be deployed to understand historical works through imitation and re-contextualisation, proposing a research method that moves beyond expected forms of textual analysis. This reiteration presents a critical frame that is an analysis through re-making. By pulling these images out of their historical context and re-making them in in the present they are resituated in time and place encouraging us to look and understand them afresh.

The reiteration of a substantial world that echoes and responds to *The Perishers* has not been an easy task. Dodd and Collins grounded their characters in a fully inhabited constructed world that was developing and contemporaneous to them. The overlaps between their domestic lives and world events suffuses the imagined world. Although *The Perishers* provides the source for *The Scruffy Herberts*, my work reflects its own time and place, as well as the critical distance it has from *The Perishers* own time. My response through *The Scruffy Herberts* is balanced and reconciled through my discussion of the impact of particular events on my own creative process in Chapter Three - Method.

It is also worth reflecting on ways that *The Scruffy Herberts* exposes the gap between its sources in *The Perishers* archive while activating issues relating to memory and making. My initial work stemmed from assumptions based on a personal view and visual information. I knew a limited amount about the work's intentions. As my research has revealed new dimensions of this work, shifting its shape and its meaning, my own iteration also alters its meaning, raising questions about the impregnation of modern sensibilities in any reconstruction and also about whether such parodic representation can extend beyond a personally inflected enquiry.

The investigation is intended to be both an analysis and reconsideration of the verbal and visual languages of comic strips and a development from their current position. This methodology will offer new insights into the source material and function as a model for a new and more developed reading of the history of British newspaper comic strips.

5. Contemporary understanding of drawing research methods

The central method applied in this research is the use of drawing as a means of acquiring knowledge through visual analysis in order to contribute to debates concerning our relationship to making. Drawing was used as close reading, functioning as a mimetic practice that has enabled the study of the source material to construct a parallel version of *The Perishers* world as well as a series of other works emerging from comics culture (Appendix Four). I have developed this method as a template to encourage creative innovation in tandem with intellectual enquiry in the study of visual material of this nature.

This research contributes to our understanding of drawing, specifically in the domain of comics production. This understanding is articulated in a series of art works that are included in the submission.

There is an intimacy between the source and the person drawing from it. Close scrutiny has allowed the invisibilities of these images to leak through, calling forth the aesthetic, the making strategy and the mindset of their creators. Making *The Scruffy Herberts* has also enabled a different kind of insight, helping me to understand the impact of works of this era on my own work. We are always seeing the world through the eyes of others and making this work has offered me glimpses of aspects of the genesis of *The Perishers*, the world it emerged from, and also of my younger self within that world.

Drawing *The Scruffy Herberts* offered me the experience of making that captures a direct contact with the production of *The Perishers* while retaining autonomy. Such first hand contact enables an active rather than passive relation to the source: doing and thinking are entwined here. As Richard Sennett writes, 'We can achieve a more humane material life, if only we better understand the making of things.'[1]

Central to my research is the premise that to appreciate how visual arts can contribute to human understanding there is a need to ground visual arts research in practices of making such as drawing. Thus the cognitive processes inherent in both creative research and art itself can be interrogated by means of its primary language. Such art works articulate the processes of interpretation as a way to understand forms and to contribute and share knowledge. As art practice as a critical research domain attains intellectual maturity as a plausible basis for raising significant questions and as a viable site for applying important cultural and educational ideas, it is timely to reflect on the ways in which imaginative insight remains an elusive criterion for judging the significance of research.

The drawing method I deployed in the course of my research has been generative, both in terms of my own art practice work but by developing teaching models on this approach to research. These teaching methods have been tested in workshop situations with students and will act as the underpinning a new Graphic Novel MA in development with the Open College of the Arts.

6. Further outputs: The application of drawing as a key research method in my practice

Being practice-led, the greatest focus of research has been in the studio. My work has matured and deepened as research into *The Perishers* and its context proposed new lines of enquiry. My original intention was to make a single work *The Scruffy Herberts* focusing directly on *The Perishers* and the social nexus that gave rise to the strip, but as research evolved I found ways

[1] Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 9.

to explore my drawing method through a wider range of forms and these are noted in Appendix Four summarising the research outputs.

These outputs articulated or elucidated various aspects of comics culture, drawing practice and exhibition strategies. The aim of these outputs was to test ideas relating to both comics culture and fine art practice and to investigate overlaps and correspondences in ways of production, audience engagement and distributional forms. These involved producing art work for a magazine, web comics project and site-specific installation. There were are a number of other outputs not discussed in this thesis for reasons of space which were produced within the PhD timeframe and these are also tabled in Appendix Four.

My interest in research is fundamentally into ways of seeing and the impact of this on the furtherance of art practices, of my own work and other work in the broader domain of visual practice. Through this research I have presented work at different stages in exhibitions and publications and contributed to debates about the place of art through the range of my activities both through practice-based art works and through the preservation of new archival material in analogue form.

There is currently a huge increase in graphic novels and comics combining political history, genre, memoir, biography and art history. This research has encouraged connections to be made and new forms of understanding to emerge. If a measure of the value of visual art research, most specifically through drawing, is seen to be the capacity to create new knowledge that is individually and culturally transformative, then it is possible to consider visual practices such as my own work in drawing not only as a descriptive or representational form, but also as a means of creating and constructing images that forms an evidential base that reveals new knowledge.

As this research draws to an end, I recognise that enquiry has shifted towards a meditation on my own practice of drawing and making. The PhD study has also provided a means for my practical examination of drawing as pastiche, with *The Scruffy Herberts* acting as a vehicle for conserving and sharing the knowledge of *The Perishers*, not merely as an inert record, but as something potentially alive again in the present moment.

Word count: 59,501

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http://comixjoint.com/underground.html (Underground Comics reference material)
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(G) On-Line Interviews:

Gary Groth Interview. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6iqnOsYCbA
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Alan Moore & Melinda Gebbie at Nottingham Contemporary,
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Charles Schulz UCLA Lecture 1971. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V6u0tn3G7I

Appendices

Appendix One: Ethics Statement

I confirm that the original Ethics Statement submitted in July 2008 for my RD05 has not required an update or re-submission as there has been no necessity for further ethics approval. I attach here that statement and confirmation of its approval.

6. Research Ethics

All projects have to take full account of key ethical considerations. If your project has ethical considerations, please use the proforma below to set out how these aspects are being approached, emphasis should be placed on what has been addressed since the submission of the RD5 and any perceived changes in the ethical status of the project as it moves forward to completion. The Code of Practice is set out in the Regulations for Higher Degree by Thesis Section 10. Further advice for completing this section is available on the Research Ethics Website. In the event of serious or complex considerations the FRRDC may refer the matter to the University Research Ethics Committee.

Does the proposed study entail ethical considerations? Yes [X] **No** [ ]

If 'No' provide below a statement of support for this position.

.....

.....

If 'yes', please indicate how have you and/or how you intend to address each of the points, as appropriate.

Consent It is intended that all participants in the research study will be interviewees. I will obtain recorded or written consent that they agree to their participation in the research and also obtain written consent of their approval of the publication of subsequent transcripts of interviews.	Observation research The only observational research is interviews which have and will be conducted on a one-to-one basis. However, in the event of any involvement of marginal third parties, their informal consent will be sought.
Deception Each participant will be given a brief written statement of the aims and intentions of the study prior to their consent to be interviewed.	Giving advice Giving advice will not be a part of the research study.
Debriefing Debriefing will not be a part of the research study.	Research undertaken in public places The research is entirely interviews and library and archive based research and studio practice. There will not be any impact on the environment and the study will observe the laws of obscenity and religious and cultural sensitivities.
Withdrawal from the investigation All participants are and will be provided with a précis of the study project at the end of the study period.	Academic integrity Contributions of all participants will be appropriately acknowledged. The source of all cited quotations will be identified. All participants will be offered access to the research findings.
Confidentiality and data protection I will obtain written permission from all participants that their identity can be acknowledged in the thesis text. The collection and storage of research materials such as audio and videotapes and photographs will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.	Animal rights There will be no research involving animals.
Protection of participants Written consent will be obtained from all participants for any published or quoted research materials loaned or given by participants. Any necessary copyrights of any reproduced research material will be acknowledged. All participants have and will be informed that they have the right to withdraw participation at any time and have no obligation to continue.	Contractual responsibilities There are no contractual responsibilities to any sponsor in this research study.

3

Has clearance from any other body/organisation been received (e.g. internal ethics committee e.g. psychology or local education authority)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If 'yes' please specify below:

.....

.....

Does this clearance need revision? Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'yes' provide brief details:

Does any other Code/s of Practice of Professional Bodies apply? Yes ☐ No ☒

If 'yes', which? (e.g. British Psychological Society).....

Are you a member of this Professional Body ? Yes ☐ No ☒

If 'yes', which one(s)? please specify e.g. British Psychological Society)

.....

Are you a member of a Professional Body? If yes (please specify below)

.....

Please specify which member(s) of your supervisory team are members of the above-mentioned professional bodies.

.....

Has a professional body been consulted about the project? Yes ☐ No ☒

If 'yes' provide brief details:

Has NHS Ethical Approval been sort for this project? Yes ☐ No ☒

If 'yes' what was the outcome of the application?

Is the research likely to require further NHS ethical approval ? Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes' please give details:

If the answer is 'yes' then you and your supervisor must prepare an appropriate application and have it approved by an MREC or LREC Committee. This can be a difficult process and it may take considerable time. Advice can be gained form your Faculties representative on the University Research Ethics Committee.

NOTE: In submitting this Section 5, you are confirming that you have read and understood the University of Derby's Code of Practice on Research Ethics. You are also confirming that, if approved, this research will be conducted in full accordance with the code.

Research Office
Ref: im/sah

UNIVERSITY *of* DERBY

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7 July 2008

Mr J Pyman
25 Myrdle Court
Myrdle Street
LONDON
E1 1HP

Dear James

Application for registration

On behalf of the Faculty Research and Research Degrees Committee I am pleased to say that your application for registration has now been approved.

Please note that your date of registration has been recorded as 23 January 2008 (this being back-dated to the day of your initial enrolment).

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success with your research degree. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Research Office.

Yours sincerely

Isobel Manning
Secretary FRRDC

Cc: J Stanton
R Clark
Prof N Campbell
R Greatbatch

Vice-Chancellor
Professor John Coyne

Incorporated in England as a charitable limited company
Registration no 3079282

Appendix Two: Interview with Mike Dodd – 19th October 2008

Mike Dodd: The old man had a somewhat strange political history. He was born in Hackney in the East End and there was mention, when I was much younger, of a Salvation Army hostel because my grandfather, Stanley, had been in the First World War and he came back, as everybody else did, to the land fit for heroes to discover there wasn't any bloody work and nowhere to live and all the rest of it, my father says that my grandfather ended up as a member of the RIC which was the police force in Ireland. Because at that time it was all part of the UK. According to my grandmother he was actually one of the black and tans because he ended up stationed in Portumna. And I think he was billeted with the family of the local police sergeant so I suspect he was a police officer and not a black and tan. Anyway, my grandmother Claire was one of the police sergeant's daughters. My dad said it was a bloody hard life for them all over there because Portumna's a fairly small place and at that time Ireland was a very poor place and the girls at home were booted off to London to make their own living at the age of 16 and they were just told "right, you're on your own, you go over there and find a way to make a living". I'm not sure if any money got back but it would have been an advantage to the family if the girl had gone because they didn't have to feed and clothe her and keep her warm and all the rest of it. Anyway, my grandmother married my poor old grandfather. She left him during the Second World War and took up with a bloke called Sid who was a black marketeer and not a man I liked very much. I had contact with Sid when I was a kid because she had taken up with him before I was born. I know my father disliked him intensely. He would put up with him and have him in the house because he was always very family orientated and you couldn't cut fathers and mothers off although I think he was a lot closer to his father than his mother. Partially because he didn't like Sid and partially he didn't like the way she had left my grandfather while he was overseas during the Second World War. Daft old bugger, he joined the Pioneers. As soon as war was declared he went off down the recruiting office and signed up, he'd already been shot up once and taken prisoner in the First World War so they bunged him in the Pioneer Corps. He was in North Africa when she moved in with Sid.

James Pyman: Did your father disapprove of Sid on moral grounds? Because he was a black marketeer?

MD: I think he disapproved of him because my grandmother was married to my grandfather, they never got divorced. My grandfather wasn't Catholic but my father and his two sisters were brought up Catholics because my grandmother was a Catholic and my grandfather had given his word, as you had to if you were marrying a Catholic, you were expected to say that you would have the children of the marriage brought up as Catholic so he did and he stuck by his word all the way through and he also stuck by the idea that marriage was for life. So after Claire left him he just lived on his own for the rest of his life. To the best of my knowledge and

belief he never had any girlfriends or anything, that was it. She'd heaved him over and he just accepted that that was that and there was nothing he could do about it. He was a very strong man in some ways.

When my dad was young he was a member of the Woodcraft Folk who were the scouts and cubs run by the Communist Party. During his life my father went from being fairly left wing, as I think an awful lot of people were especially during the war and at the end of the war when they wanted the class system and all the rest of it to come to pieces, by the time he died he was an ardent Thatcherite and he had travelled right the way across that political spectrum. It has been said in the 19th Century that anybody with any sense is a liberal in his 20s and a conservative by the time he's 45. So he ended up as a Thatcherite after starting off on the left. I haven't got his early cartoons. The first cartoons he ever got published were under the name of 'Mogg', first of all it was two Gs and then it was one G. Dr Mark Bryant at the London Press Club has written a book about cartoonists and there's a mention in there and he knows where that stuff was published. I was growing up while all this was going on and it was perfectly normal to have a lunatic cartoonist sitting in the attic shrieking at his own jokes. In fact, he started in the back garden. When he first started he was asked to do the strip by a fellow called Bill Herbert. They had been in the RAF together. I think they might even have been in this strange thing called the Servicing Commando and they got on quite well. I think it's possibly something to do with the fact that they both liked food and drink. My father really liked a drink. He wasn't an alcoholic by any measure of means but he enjoyed his drink, a daily glass or three. He liked bitter, but he also liked Guinness, and he also liked wine. He wasn't particularly fond of white wine although he'd drink it at a pinch. He didn't like turps (laughs). That's a joke.

JP: What are your earliest recollections of *The Perishers*? Can you remember your father getting the job?

MD: I'll give you a brief rundown of the family history. My parents got married three weeks after they'd met on an RAF base when the old man had just been shipped back from Europe. He had been with this strange unit called the RAF Servicing Commando which was a combined operations group. They had a number, 3201 or something. They had been through North Africa, Italy, then France, Germany and Holland, then various places, and the finally shipped back to the UK to people wondering what to do with this mad mob of freebooters. They were supposed to be a commando group, not like the SAS whose speciality was operations behind enemy lines. This lot were all RAF personnel who were also given commando training and the idea was to take over frontline airfields and service frontline aircraft so that as allied forces moved forward they could send these blokes in to take over an airfield so that once the fighting was over to start fixing the bloody aircraft. That was the idea. I'm not quite sure it ever quite worked that way. My father never talked about it an awful lot except that I know it made a very

deep impression on him. I think when they weren't being shot at and bombed and having the very life scared out of them they were actually having quite a good time. He told us some funny stories about things. There was a very strong bond between him and all the blokes that were in the unit as well. They formed a Servicing Commando Association and his old unit used to have reunions. He stopped going to them about three or four years before his death because there was a chum of his of his there who had been a sergeant and he said it broke his heart to see this old boy because this fellow had been around six foot three and a really big and healthy commanding man and old age had hit him like a bloody road accident and he couldn't control his mouth properly and my father said he couldn't face it and it was just too awful and it might have been a reminder of what might happen to him.

Anyway, my parents got married very quickly after they met just after the war. My mother had to be demobbed especially because they got married just before Christmas 1945. They moved into this awful place in Kilburn which was actually up in Maida Vale somewhere. It had been condemned in about 1890 but it was still there. It's been knocked down since. It was a three or four storey building and it was on a corner and it was one of those old triangular buildings you used to get. And that's where we lived when I was born. Then my sister came along so I would have been nearly four when she was born. By that time I had got polio and was in hospital. Then when I was about six or seven we got a London County Council maisonette flat just off Wimbledon Common at No. 13 Glenorbyn Road. It was a Ground Floor two-storey maisonette. A maisonette is effectively a four-storey block with two two-storey maisonettes. We had a small front garden and a back garden and the people on the First Floor, their gardens were on the far side of the road. So if they wanted to sit in their garden you had to go down the stairs and cross the road and open the gate. I think they gave us the Ground Floor one because of my disability. And we were living there when he got the job doing *The Perishers* because he used to have to do it at home. He might have done the strips in the bedroom or he might have done them on the table in the dining room, but a lot of it he would have done at home at night. He worked at that time for Halas & Bachelor who made the first animated version of 'Animal Farm' which was actually funded by the CIA although the old man didn't know that at the time. The old man moved to Young & Rubicam afterwards. He actually got the job as a visualiser designing the ads and doing the artwork. One thing about my father was he was prepared to take a chance and prepared to grab an opportunity if he saw it. He was watching the copywriters and thought I can do that and they get more money than I do, so he then said to one of the bosses "look, I can do this, I can write you this stuff, give us a chance and I'll do it". As my mother once put it, "your father was prepared to try a bluff".

And very early on in his career, not long after we had moved to Wimbledon, he won a competition with 'Time' magazine. But in the meantime the 'Mirror' had started The Perishers up in 1957 as an answer to Schulz's *Peanuts* and they were testing it out in the Northern edition. They had two people working on it, one of them was Dennis Collins who was the artist and the other one was a man whose name I never learnt but this poor sod had a nervous breakdown with the strain of it all, ended up snapping his pencils and running away and having to be taken off to make wicker baskets or something. And Bill Herbert casting about thought my mate Maurice has got a sense of humour and he can draw because he had known Dad during his RAF time and he asked him if he wanted to draw the strip. The job then was to do the script, do the jokes as a sort of cross between a daily joke and a soap opera, a situation comedy. So he had to do the joke and he had to do rough drawings and he'd do the roughs with all the jokes in and he'd post them off to Bill or he'd take them into the 'Mirror' office occasionally and then Bill would OK them and then pass them on to Dennis Collins who lived up in Liverpool I think.

Because the problem was that both of them were on freelance contracts, neither of them were actually under contract to the Mirror as employees, and the result was that neither of them got a pension from the 'Mirror'. It was especially unfortunate for poor old Dennis. He accepted it and I think he was on reasonably good money and I think he'd made reasonable provision for his old age except there wasn't too much of it unfortunately. I never met Dennis Collins. My father only saw him two or three times a year. They used to get on very well because they used to have very long conversations on the phone. And I can remember when Dennis retired he sent my father all his little set of standard figures which he had drawn up to show the comparative heights. The one thing that used to make Dennis twitch was the 'Eyeballs In The Sky' jokes. Make him break his pencils because of the terrible amount of details Dad used to jam in. He sketched them in. The pads of tracing paper all got junked. He did the damn thing for 49½ years and you cant store that amount of stuff. You'd have to build a bloody house to put it in! But he used to do these quite detailed drawings and then eventually Dennis retired and they got somebody else to do it for a bit and then my father took over doing the whole thing and by that time they had done *The Perishers* films for 'Filmfare' which were shown three or four times on the BBC and to do that my father had taken a sabbatical from Young & Rubicam. Effectively what had happened was that he had just taken early retirement. They had said 'OK Maurice, take the time off, it being understood that after your year's sabbatical on full pay we won't be expecting you to come back to work'. But he was actually doing the storyboards for the scripts for the animated cartoons, most of which were based on jokes he'd already done in the strip and various scenes and scenarios that were played out. And at the end of that Dennis had retired so he took over doing the whole thing. He had worked on the cartoon series doing

the scripts and sketching out the figures how he wanted them. After that, once it went into the production phase he didn't have an awful lot to do with it in the sense of actual creative work. There was a certain amount of editorial oversight because the terms of his contract gave him rights to the actual drawings of the characters and things.

JP: There was a marketing push around that time and it seemed like the newspaper strips changed the look slightly to look like the cartoons?

MD: They didn't change the look to reflect the animated thing, they changed the look because my father wasn't as good an artist as Dennis Collins.

JP: There is a transitionary period.

MD: I think they were somebody else. I don't think my father took over immediately. I can tell you which are Dennis' and I can tell you which are my father's.

JP: Because there was a period of 'Marlon's Guide to Brane Surjery' occurs and it's very different to what's gone before.

MD: I think those are actually my father's and that was because he was trying to draw it like an idiot.

JP: Because when he took over the writing Wellington didn't exist.

MD: No, he invented him. There were a number of characters and as he said he took them out and had them shot and replaced them with his own placemen. Effectively he was given a strip and given carte blanche so he took it and peopled it with people he wanted it to be full of. One of the things was the old pipe yard, and I think the idea for the old pipe yard came from where we lived in Wimbledon, there was this great big LCC estate called the Argyle Estate, they were still building this bloody estate because my grandfather ended up living on it in this rather small flat. He was a motor mechanic.

JP: Did that influence your father?

MD: Well, my father started off as a mechanic. He was working as a mechanic in some bloody awful factory in the East End and then he signed up; volunteered for the forces. He wanted to be a bomber pilot or an air gunner but he couldn't find Gibraltar on the map so they decided he was going to be a mechanic instead. He wasn't a very good mechanic and he never claimed to be a very good mechanic. The thing they had to do to pass out as engineers or whatever they called them was they were supposed to get two pieces of aluminium and drill something out of something so that it would fit into something else but it would fit in an airtight way. What actually happened, of course, was they all filled up with water because they used to sink them all in a tank but they all got passed anyway. You had to be a compete idiot not to pass.

One of the reasons they moved into this awful place in Maida Vale was because, despite the fact that they had just got married and despite the fact that by that time my mum was pregnant with the first baby although she had a miscarriage with that one, that they couldn't get any

council housing. He said he was appalled to be told by some bloody German woman that 'you should be out there rebuilding the nation' and he said 'I've just been out there shooting your relatives, darling!'. He said, on second thoughts, she might have been a Jewish refugee from Germany or Austria but it rather pissed him off. Which didn't do him an awful lot of good because he developed a bit of a dislike for local authorities and people in authority from thereon. But eventually we got this LLC Housing on this estate and they were having to build brand new sewers and other things so thee were vast stocks of these pipes all over the place which is where Wellington's pipe yard came from.

JP: In the strip is Croynge Croydon?

MD: He made it up. We never lived in Croydon. He lived in Shepperton. We moved to Shepperton from Wimbledon. We were in Wimbledon for about 2½-3 years while he was saving desperately to try and buy a house. It wasn't that he didn't like living on the estate although he didn't really. One of the things that really irritated him was the attitude of the local authority because he painted the front door of our maisonette and the Council came round and told him he had to put it back the same colour. They dictated the colour which he didn't like very much. But what they were saying is 'you are not allowed to look after this property, we look after it'. You're not allowed to do anything to it at all'. If you get a leaky tap you had to ring the Council up and wait for them to send a plumber. You couldn't do it yourself, you weren't allowed to. Of course, what happened was you just fixed it yourself and didn't tell them. But then, just round the corner from where we were there were a couple of tower blocks they put up and when they first put these things up they had fully equipped laundries in them on the ground floor for the residents. You didn't have washing machines in your own flat, what they had were these bloody great big industrial sized washers and dryers downstairs and then there was a drying area out the back so you could pin your stuff up on the line. Within six months of people being moved into these blocks these laundries had been wrecked and the council came round and replaced everything and they got wrecked again and eventually the council came round and took all the equipment away and just junked it and left the empty rooms. And it was something that distressed him a great deal, that people were given these facilities, had these facilities – the machines were free, you didn't have to pay for them, you just went down and used it - and they smashed the things up. And he didn't want to live among people who thought like that. They thought it was their God-given right to have all this stuff and if they smashed it the council would have to come round and replace it so it didn't matter. Well, eventually the council came round and said 'bugger it'

JP: Although the Council's misguided notion was that it was easier to do it than plumb in every single flat to inculcate some kind off communality.

MD: I don't know if they were thinking along those lines at all. It might have been that it was easier to put them at the bottom than it was to have all these things plumbed in. Of course, the

sensible thing to do would have been to let somebody open a laundrette on the corner and charge and say 'if you want to do your laundry you can either to do it in the bath or you can take it down there (next to a nice purpose-built pub). We were the first family to move to the place we occupied. Almost everybody we knew who lived on that block, all the families in that block that we occupied, moved out within a couple of years, three years. All they wanted to do was have somewhere not too expensive to live while they saved their bloody money up like mad to try and get a mortgage and go where you didn't have the local authority saying 'you can't have a front door that colour' or 'you must do this' and 'you must do that'.

JP: Why Shepperton?

MD: He didn't want to go back to the east end of London or anywhere back that way. Secondly, they were governed to a certain extent by the amount of money they would be able to raise. The house they bought in Shepperton, 43 Broadlands Avenue, that cost two thousand five hundred pounds, would you believe it? Two thousand five hundred quid, which meant that for that he had to have a two hundred and fifty pound deposit. Of the deposit he had, in the end, none. He got the house because he borrowed a hundred and twenty five pounds from an ex-services friend of his, a bloke who was in the Special Air Service when they were both in the Special Air Service together after the war. This bloke lent him a hundred and twenty five quid repayable as and when and without any interest and the other hundred and twenty five quid he got from his employers. He borrowed from his firm. He never borrowed anything from the Mirror because he didn't work for them, he wasn't an employee. So he had the money but then the building society said 'we notice that half the deposit has come from your employers' and he said 'well, yes, this is a sign that they place faith in me - that I've got good career prospects and so on'. He didn't tell them where the other half had come from, he just presented them with the money. And I think it was a combination of the area because Shepperton is a nice area, it was then and it still is, effectively. It's a bit like Chertsey. I think Chertsey isn't quite as nice as Shepperton and especially Broadlands Avenue. We didn't know this when we moved in but after we moved in we discovered Broadlands Avenue was reckoned to be Nobs Avenue, if you like, it was *The Road*. It's not terribly long, it's not a terribly wide road, but what it has got is grass verges and it's got trees all the way along which gives it a certain something. Most of the houses are on quite large plots. Some of them have been demolished and the plots have been divided up so they've now squeezed three houses where one used to sit. They were all detached. It was a nice place and it had a big garden. Broadlands Avenue itself was a very quiet road and you don't get huge amounts of traffic up and down it and it was just around the corner from the high street and there was a bloody great recreation ground at the back, a bloody great big public park, so we had a nice big garden. And I think that was what did it. And also Broadlands Avenue is no more than a quarter of a mile from Shepperton railway station. Shepperton is the end of the line. It was supposed to go through to Chertsey but the freedom-

loving people of Shepperton wouldn't give it planning permission. Anyway, the line stops at Shepperton. It's a bit of a trip because it means that to get up to town it takes an hour because it's a slow train all the time. If you got the half five or quarter to six from Waterloo you'd be back at quarter to seven so from the old man's point of view it was a five, ten minute walk maximum just round the corner and down the end of the road so it was easy for commuting. At one stage my father had been sent to Amsterdam or somewhere over in Europe by the agency. He had this ferocious night in a bar or in a restaurant with a lot of colleagues where they were drinking Prince of Wales cocktails which are large brandies and champagne and he had so much of this stuff that apparently it effectively ripped the lining out of his stomach. It did him a fair mischief. Anyway, the result was that he got some bug or he got something and he ended up with an attack of the squits that lasted for something like fifteen years. So he stopped using the trains because they didn't have loos on them and he got very, very nervous about the state of his stomach so we used to drive up. I used to drive him up. He knew the location of every public toilet between our house and the office. And the office then when he was working for Young & Rubicam was at Greater London House which was up in Mornington Crescent just before you get to Camden Town, in the old cigarette factory there. I didn't start driving him 'til I went to college when I was 18 when I left the Salesians which was the school I was at and I went to North West London Poly. I was doing a degree in Sociology. My father was determined that I was going to go to university because he couldn't see that I'd be able to make a living any other way. Unfortunately I wasn't sure that I agreed with him. Secondly, I had failed French and Latin O level. I had no hope of passing Latin. The headmaster put me into it for the exercise because he said it would be good for me to know what failure was. I thought he was a complete wanker. Anyway, my grade in Latin was X which means did not attend.

If you wanted to do History or Geography at University then, which I quite fancied doing, then you needed French (or a foreign language) and if you wanted to do Law which I also fancied doing you had to have Latin. That left me stuffed, didn't it. The only thing I was qualified for was Sociology which was the only thing almost everybody else was qualified for. It was the growing post-war thing; they seemed to believe it was going to be the answer to society's problems. It wasn't 'til afterwards they discovered it actually caused as many problems, in fact it made things worse. Anyway, I lasted two terms of that and then I left. But while I was up there I started driving him back and forth. God, it was a nightmare that traffic, it was awful. We used to leave the house at quarter to six in the morning and he'd be at work at seven o'clock in the morning. And then sometimes I'd have to go and pick him up in the evening or he'd get a minicab home. The firm were very generous with minicabs because they expected people to work long hours and they expected them to take clients out for drinks and things. And every now and again he'd ring up and ask if I could go and get him or he'd go on the train and I'd then

have to go over and pick him up at Walton Station. Once I had a car we stopped going to Shepperton because you can get from Waterloo to Walton-on-Thames in half an hour. That's the next stop after Weybridge coming out on the Weybridge line. That's only a half hour trip and then he'd hop across to the hotel over the road, have a couple of beers and ring me up and say would I go and get him so I'd have to go and prise him off the bar and take him home. He worked bloody hard, actually. (The health thing with his stomach.). I don't want to give the impression he was a complete lush because he wasn't. He did work bloody hard. He was one of these blokes who worked hard and played hard. He wasn't a sportsman. Football wasn't his game. He wasn't the least bit interested in sport but he threw everything he had into everything he did. So if it was work he worked bloody hard. He earned his money. He always believed it was your obligation to earn your money. *The Perishers* wasn't badly paid but after we moved to Shepperton there was another problem for dear old dad. He was always determined that he was going to do the best for his kids. He was going to do as much as he possibly could to give them a good start in life. The result was when it came for me to leave St Ignatius Primary School in Sunbury I had the choice of two schools. Because I had actually passed my eleven plus much to everybody's amazement the county council had said they were prepared to pay for me to go to St George's college over at Weybridge. Because my father wanted me to go to a Catholic school it was either that or go to Gunnersbury Grammar. Now Gunnersbury Grammar involved two train trips and three buses which meant you had to be on the seven o'clock train to get there and it also meant you weren't going to get back before half past six, seven o'clock at night. At that time I had two crutches and I had two calipers on, one on each leg, plus a waistband round the waist so moving about wasn't terribly easy. And the old man thought that would kill me. That would probably do me in. so that wasn't an option. So St Georges College, which is over in Weybridge, the county council would pay the fees for me to go there. The trouble is they wouldn't take me because I had a disability. They said to my father "Well, of course, you have to understand that this is a very sports-orientated school and we expect all of our boys to take part in sports". And my father said "Well, if he's disabled its going to be a bit of a difficulty, isn't it?". My father said he came very close to clouting the Headmaster who was a priest. He almost clambered across the desk and hit him. So casting about he found the Salesian college which is just here in Shepperton which is a fee-paying school and he finally decided that the only thing to do was to pay for me to go there. And he then decided he was going to pay for my sisters because none of them passed the 11 plus, not because they were stupid. I don't think the primary school was terribly good for them. But the only place they were going to go was the local bog-standard comprehensive. And he decided he wasn't going to have that so he sent them all to a private girls school run by nuns over in Sunbury. That meant that at one point he was paying for four of us to have private education. That's loads and loads of school fees. That's where all the money went. That's one of the reasons he never

ended up rich. He spent it all. Just as well I suppose, who wants to end up the richest corpse in the graveyard. So the money for doing *The Perishers*, especially when he was doing the strip on his own, wasn't bad money. I know he was being quite well paid in relative terms at Young & Rubicam. Had he not been paying out a fortune in school fees he would have been quite well off. And of course you don't get any tax relief or anything else for school fees. They don't give an inch. So he decided to invest it in that rather than invest it in his old age or anything else. They had the house so eventually they paid the house off. I can remember he used to complain about the mortgage – nineteen pounds a month I think it was.

JP: What were your dad's influences?

MD: He loved *Peanuts* but it got to the point where he just wouldn't read it for fear that he would subconsciously nick the jokes. I do remember one of the jokes he found very, very funny and he understood it. It really struck home at the very core of his being you might say. And that was one where Charlie Brown meets some new kid who's just moved into the neighbourhood and he says to this kid "What's your name?" and the kid says "Four!" and Charlie Brown says "Your father's named you 'four' as his way of protesting about the way in which we're all being reduced to numbers and ciphers" and all the rest of it and the other kid says "No, it's his way of giving in!". Now, my father didn't do that sort of joke. To a certain extent, the problem was that he did do the sort of Charlie Brown joke like "Well, when my boat comes in I'm going to be waiting at the airport!". That kind of thing, but that was because he was a reasonably optimistic sort of a soul but he would affect this slightly gloomy persona on the grounds that if you expect it to go wrong and it doesn't life's full of pleasant surprises whereas if you expect everything to be alright you're going to be constantly disappointed. As for influences, I'm not sure. I don't think there were any in that sense. One of the things about the strips is he does a lot of continuous backgrounds, a bit like a cartoon, almost like a frozen animation because the characters advance across the scene. And I think some of that comes from when he was working on the backgrounds on 'Animal Farm', as you paint across and move the artwork layer upon layer in front of the camera. I don't think there were any direct influences. I know he liked Giles. There weren't any other cartoon books he ever bought us. I know he read Mad Magazine occasionally. My father would probably tell you more about things that influenced him than I could. I know he didn't think much of Britart and I know he didn't think much of Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst and all that.

When he came out of the Air Force I think he worked as a locomotive fireman. He got a serviceman's educational grant and was able to go to art college, it might have been Slade. You'll have to email me a follow-up set of questions and I can get my mother to answer some of them. Because when he first met my mother one of his chat-up lines was "would you like to come and see these brooches I've made?" and he had made these rather rough brooches and

done some drawings but it gave him a focus. When my father went to art school on his grant my mother decided it would be a good idea to join in a bit. Now, she's actually quite artistic although she never has done an awful lot of it. I think she was doing some painting at some time but lost interest. I remember him telling me that she went and did the art history course with him and sat the exam at the end of it and did better than he did. He was a great one for good, figurative art.

They took me down to see the local GP and this bloody idiot said that I had flu and then when my mother got there he agreed at my father's request to refer us to the hospital which he did, and he wrote out this note, sealed it in an envelope and the old man ripped it open and read it and the doctor said "that's not for you it's for the doctor at Great Ormond Street" and the note said 'The child has flu and the mother has hysterical flu symptoms because this is her third pregnancy but the first live birth'. She'd had one miscarriage and one stillbirth and then I came along. Anyway, the old man took us down to Great Ormond Street and got there into reception and they called some doctor round to have a look at us and this doctor looked at me and said "This child's got polio, put him in isolation", looked at my mother and ran the stethoscope over her and said "You've got polio too, you're in", so he goes in with a family of three and comes out with one! He went back to the doctor's to see the doctor to have words with him and the receptionist wouldn't let him in so he kicked the surgery door in and the doctor went out through the window, he actually jumped out of the back window of his own surgery. But he was the Medical Officer of Health and I caught polio in the week with the highest number of polio cases in the entire post-war epidemic and this bloody idiot didn't notice the symptoms. He had no idea what he was up to. I'm afraid this destroyed my father's faith in most medicine and most doctors. And it's one of the things that I think comes out of the 'Eyeballs In The Sky'. He doesn't trust scientists. He reckons all scientists are a bunch of fakers. Remember he did a series about the 'Oort layer'? Scientists have apparently discovered there's another layer out there in the solar system called the Oort layer. It was all very strange. He's constantly taking the piss. You know, 'Don't do that or you'll rend the fabric of the Pooliverse'.

It stood about so tall, a great big mahogany cabinet with a nine inch screen in the middle of it. This was long after the Coronation. He loved watching the 'Noddy' cartoons. In think they were actually string puppets. And another one he liked was 'Sooty'. He always found 'Sooty' hysterically funny, but that was because he thought it was very, very funny for a man to make a living by dressing his hand up in a glove puppet and then squirting ink in his own face. And he thought there was a certain lovable lunacy about that. With *The Perishers* it's possible to tease out all sorts of strange elements. It's also possible, as Tolkien once said, that he's read criticisms and analysis of 'The Lord of the Rings', he said "There's stuff in there I never put

there. They see stuff I don't even know about!". And it's possible to over-analyse it. I can tell you that my father was quite a spiritual man, his Catholicism meant a lot to him and it was rather upsetting that I stopped going for a long time which he found rather distressing because he believed in it. He had a very sceptical attitude to what science tells us and I'm not bloody well surprised. He took a very dim view of science. That was one of the things that really made him tick. He didn't trust science and scientists. He didn't trust modern medicine.

JP: Politics?

MD: I don't think he trusted politicians a great deal. I know he thought very highly of Maggie and one of the reasons he did was that his own life experiences had taught him that trade unions were not necessarily a good thing, probably a bad thing. And I'll give you an example: at the end of the war one of the jobs he did was work for the post office and he said the amount of theft that went on was virtually organised theft going on all the time. They were protected by the union, of course, so the management was virtually incapable of doing anything about it. And then you had the print unions. He actually applied at one stage to get a job as a printer and he had to go off and be interviewed by all these officials from the chapel. I think it might have been one of the newspapers. And they had it all stitched up, didn't they! If you weren't one of their sons you didn't get a bloody union card and you couldn't work. That was it, it was that simple. He had the same thing later with SLADE, the Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers and Engineers or something. He was forced to join one of the unions. Eventually, and this was just before the whole union thing went down the pan, the print unions got such a grip on The Mirror's management that he had to join a trade union and they wanted him to join SLADE but they were going to make life very difficult. The NGA (National Graphical Association) were the big boys and were actually the typesetters and the main printers but SLADE was the secondary union and then you've got SOGAT which is the Society for Graphical and Allied Trades. And rather than join SLADE which was what The Mirror told him he had to do because he was producing artwork he joined the NUJ because he said he wasn't going to join a print union because he didn't like them. He said at the Mirror they'd have truckloads of knocked-off stuff trundled in through the printworks and they'd auction it off at work. And there were people who'd go in, they'd clock on and then they'd go off and do another job somewhere else and then come back at the end of the shift and clock off or a mate would clock off for them. That's why when Maggie was going to take the unions on his view was "Good luck!". You'll find in the earlier cartoons there's an awful lot of jokes about 'that nice Mr Wilson' and that's because he didn't think much of him either. Although at one time he was extremely left-wing and by the end of his life he was quite right-wing, he wasn't hang 'em and flog 'em, he was quite right wing. He was a great believer in the idea of public service, national service. He believed that in times of trouble it was a citizen's duty to be prepared to defend his country and to sign up. And one of the reasons he didn't like Harold Wilson was because Harold Wilson had made sure that he

stayed in the Civil Service throughout the war. That was my father's view of it. Whether that was a correct view is neither here nor there. As opposed to Dennis Healy who signed up as a volunteer and came back as a major after some very, very unpleasant wartime experiences.

Other influences? We were. Us lot. All those characters are an amalgam of various people. A couple of them not. 'Dirty McSquirty' I'm not quite sure where he came from. You can draw a parallel with 'Pigpen' there and I'm not sure that it would be unreasonable to draw that parallel. Dad never mentioned it directly but I know he'd read 'Pigpen' some considerable time before he came up with 'Dirty McSquirty'. It may have been a subconscious influence. It may not have been an influence at all, it may have just been a strike of desperation. Wellington was a lot of him. There was a hell of a lot of him in Wellington. Maisie and Marlon and Baby Grumplin' there was a hell of a lot us in there. I know he used some of my jokes which actually led to a whole load of Wellington/Boot jokes. He used one of my sister's jokes at least. I wrote to him when I was in South Africa. I was on the boat and I sent this air mail letter back saying "I'm not spending all my time in the bar, I'm actually getting a great deal of exercise because they've got a wounded seagull out here that needs to be taken out and about and looked after every now and again, so I do it every day, it's what's known as taking a tern around the deck" boom boom – T.E.R.N. He did use that one. And then I wrote saying that I'd just been to this wildlife park but I didn't think much of it. In fact the only wildlife I'd seen was an ant and I'd had to irritate that myself. That led to a whole series of wildlife or safari park jokes. My sister Rosemary came up with one of the crab pool jokes once. She was asking if he was going to put jokes in there about 'prawnography' and you could see a little light came on above his head 'ping' because the thing about the crab pool jokes is when he used to let himself run riot he really did! He didn't write things down on pads and things in that sense. He wouldn't sit down with a sheet of paper like that. He might scribble a joke down on a piece of paper if an idea came to him and that would be it. He'd actually do the joke on paper as part of the strip and make it work that way. He didn't used to sit down and wrestle with puns and things. When he did the strip he sat there with his drawing pad in front of him at the desk with his lightbox and that's how he did it. He didn't used to sit down and write jokes out. It was always a combination of the verbal and the visual. He dictated where the characters went. He actually drew quite detailed roughs. Rosemary might have a couple. I'll ask her because she's the one who's got what little we've got left. Just about everything we had including the very early cartoons we gave over to Mark and they're down at the Cartoon Museum in the University of Kent. Now we've put them on loan but as far as we're concerned they can have them. We grew up and lived with it. I've got enough memory of him. I've got a couple of books upstairs and go up there and have a quiet chortle and think 'How on earth did he ever come up with that?'. Of course, one of the other influences is just what bloody well went on around you. The crab pool jokes

actually came from our old English sheepdog going and looking in a crab pool one day. That's where he got the idea. The first one we got was called Boot and my mother insisted we get rid of it because it was big and it was hairy and it was muddy and all the rest of it. Unfortunately we kids got very, very snotty about this and then the old man decided he was going to have another anyway. So the next thing she knew about it he rang up from work and said "Oh, is there any post?" and she said "Yes, there's something here from Norwich or Lincolnshire or Goole" or some bloody place. He said "Ooh, yes, I'm expecting that, open it up and read it to me would you?". She said "'Dear Mr Dodd, many thanks for your cheque for £250 or whatever it was. This is to confirm that Bob the sheepdog will be arriving from ..'" She said "What the bloody so-and-so etcetera etcetera!". It turned out to be a stroke of genius because this dog was hysterically funny. This is a dog which actually had a sense of humour. It was quite young, I think he was about six or seven months old. He wasn't a teeny weeny pup. The first thing they did was my father bought this do-it-yourself shed thing like a garden shed. You could stand up in it. And he put this up in the verandah of the house. They've knocked it down now, but it was an old house, a square building and running round the side was a verandah built out and covered over like an old colonial house, and the place was actually three feet off the ground on stilts. And they put this kennel up in the corner with the idea that the dog would stay in here. Well, he hated staying in there and he used to howl all bloody night which got rather embarrassing. He used to lock the dog on the verandah as well and what happened was my parents' bedroom was at the front right-hand corner of the house and they had French windows and the dog just used to come up and stand with his paws against the bloody windows peering in at them all night long. And then within a week of arrival he developed this appalling cough and my father took him to the vet and the vet said "You'll have to take him inside for a while because he's getting a cold. You'll have to get him used to it gently" so they moved the dog into the house and he never left. The kennel ended up as a sort of storage shed before finally my father gave up and dismantled it and I think it ended up on the bonfire one year.

The dog lasted about fifteen years. He died when I was overseas in South Africa which was a shame. They had to have him put down eventually. As old dogs do he started to get horribly incontinent and he was going blind and he was going deaf and it got to the point where he couldn't walk about much. And the vet finally said "I think, Maurice, it's time, it's the only thing to do" because the dog wasn't himself terribly happy. He didn't like making a mess inside the house, he was very well housetrained. I think he found it very depressing strangely enough.

We used to do the most terrible things to him. This dog had life organised, though. The driveway ran down the side of the house and my father had put a gate up with a big sign on it saying 'Beware of the dog, ring bell and wait' and there was a bell fixed on to the edge of the

woodwork on the veranda and the dog used to lay there with his nose through the bars. When kids came along they'd open the gate and he'd just raise his nose and they'd tread on him like a bloody 'welcome' mat. He wouldn't pay a blind bit of attention. If women came down the drive he'd stand up and bark but if they opened the gate he'd back off. He'd make a lot of noise but he wouldn't actually do anything else, just 'bark bark bark' but if they kept on coming he'd keep on backing off. If men came down he'd stand up and bark and if they opened the gate he went for them. He went for the milkman once. In fact, the bloke who made the sign, he'd painted this sign, this bloody thing, ten feet long this piece of wood, and it says 'Beware of the dog, ring bell and wait'. And my father heard all this noise and looked out the front room window to find this signwriter carrying the sign legging it down the street with the dog in hot pursuit because he's only opened the bloody gate. One Christmas the old man gave him some cream and brandy mixed up with a bit of Christmas pud just to see whether he liked it. The dog liked it very much and then rushed out into the garden and just fell over. Ran about three or four times and then just rolled over with his legs in the air. My father got an awful lot of ideas from that dog, because what he'd do is he'd try and put himself in the dog's place and he'd think about what was going on. An awful lot of the jokes, especially between Wellington and Boot, are actually my father's thoughts really. They're actually his own thought processes going on there. Something I remember with some of the 'Eyeballs In The Sky' jokes. You could hear him up in his study when he'd come up with a cracker, you could hear him laughing hysterically. And he used to get it with Bill Mevin. He'd known Bill for years and years and years. My mum says they used to have telephone conversations where the old man used to do an awful lot of sympathising with Bill. Bill was a natural-born worrier and he's been a freelancer all his life and I don't think he's got much of a pension fund which doesn't help so he's always been a bit twitchy. But my mother said within five minutes of a conversation starting with Bill my old man would be in hysterics, falling about. It was exactly the same working relationship as he did it with Dennis Collins except that Bill always insisted on putting his byline on the artwork first. (SECRET ABOUT BILL). They had worked together at Halas & Bachelor, they had known each other a long time.

JP: Was there any editorial interference?

MD: The editor did ring up one day and ask why the cartoon for the past week had been infested with a German-speaking tortoise and various bugs and beetles and things. He was a trifle bemused. And then eventually they introduced a cat. I think it might have been Piers Morgan but one of the editors wanted a cat. But the Cartoons Editor would have to tell you about that. He's a fellow called Ken Layson . He was very good at the time my father died.

My mother will know which art college he went to, she'll know far more which artists he admired. The problem was when I was younger was that he was almost always working. He

worked very, very hard all his life. We always thought that by the time he got to 60, 65 and he showed no signs of retiring or giving up the strip, we all became convinced that eventually he wouldn't retire and the reason he wouldn't retire was because if he *did* retire he'd probably explode. He'd just go bang with frustration at not having things to do and things to keep him occupied or things to be creative with. And then of course, while he was doing the strip, he also had 'Merrymole' on the go. He wrote the 'Merrymole' books which were another attempt to make some money, of course. It's a shame they didn't sell a lot better than they did. They were a strange amalgam because they were really aimed at kids and they're not really kids' books. They're adults books, they're grown-up books. There were three but I don't think the third one was ever published. It's not that heavyweight a book but those are my father's illustrations. You can tell. Well I can. You can tell from his use of line with the pen. My father always said (don't tell Bill Mevin) Dennis Collins was the best artist who ever did the strip and there's no way he'd ever have claimed to be as good as or comparable. He always thought Dennis was the best. The old man was the one who came up with the landscape thing but Dennis was the one who produced the finished drawings. When the old man won the competition with 'Time' magazine when we lived in Wimbledon the prize was a week in Istanbul and he had to produce some sort of report and he did all these pen and ink drawings of Istanbul.

(About 'Merrymole') I typed that one out. I had to correct his spelling. He could never spell 'their' as in the possessive 'their' turn. He always spelt it 'theer'. And that again is dotted with all sorts of strange, sideways references to his days in the SAS and what the SAS get up to and that kind of thing. My father joined the Special Air Service when they reformed the regiment as a TA regiment after the war because at the end of the war they disbanded the Special Air Service because as my father said the MoD did not like irregular units and the SAS were an irregular unit in the sense that they weren't immediately under the discipline of the High Command. You had to give them an awful lot of freedom to do what they wanted simply because if you're operating behind enemy lines you're not on the phone all day asking for instructions. And they were sometimes expected to operate in the most extraordinary circumstances. The High Command don't like freebooters. They want everybody all regimented and massed like the Guards but the trouble is that generation after generation learns that that's not necessarily the best way to do things. So there an awful lot of references or approaches or attitudes that he got from that.

The jokes ended up in the strip because they happened. They bought my sister a Spacehopper and he suddenly realised that there was a fund of jokes to be tapped there. He had to do six jokes a week for the Mirror. He was supposed to be two or three months ahead of himself. And then atone time it was running in the Sunday Mirror as well although it was out of continuity. So

he'd do one joke a week for the Sunday Mirror. He always tried to stay *six* months in advance instead of three months so he could take a fortnight's holiday without having to take the stuff with him. He used to twitch all the time about making sure he was ahead of the work. He was always terrified of what authors call 'white sheet fever' where you put the paper in the typewriter and look at it and nothing happens. You haven't got an idea in your head, you've got no idea what to do. He used to get this when he was an advertising copywriter and the first thing was he'd sit there and write 'tram nam blimph' across the top because it broke up the white space. A bit of psychological self-persuasion probably. So the result was he was always on the lookout for things that could give rise to a smile, a laugh and all the rest of it. And of course the world's full of them if you think about it hard enough. And as I think he would have said if you're either receptive or desperate enough. And if you're sitting there in front of a blank sheet of paper and you've got six jokes to come up with you're very receptive. It was variations on a theme. The Spacehopper thing was just taking an idea and seeing how far you could make it work because if you had an idea you didn't just throw it away *if* you could make it work. There were ideas he'd try out that he couldn't make work, he'd do two of them and then think "This is not going to go anywhere, I'll do the one joke and just kill it off, just leave it". And because he was working six months in advance you couldn't be overly topical. You could only go on about things that people would associate with when they actually read it. Like Spacehoppers. He cottoned onto them fairly early on. And little trampolines as well. It was reflective of the world he was in. The whole point was that it was a close-up view of 'childrens'' experience. An awful lot of what happens to those kids and an awful lot of those jokes are quite adult jokes or quite adult thoughts put into childrens' mouths. If you take, for example, Baby Grumpling; one of them I was reading the other day when he's had the day at play school or nursery school or infants' school or whatever it is and he's walking home with Maisie and she says "What did you do today?" and he says "well, today the teacher showed us how to cut out little felt figures and stick them onto such-and-such" and then the last frame Baby Grumpling's saying "If you ask me she's deranged". And there's another one where he comes out and something's all gone wrong at school and he comes out with this thing wrapped round him. You can't actually see him, all you can see is an arm and a leg and he's saying "If you ask me this place needs more supervision!". It's kids but it's an adult's voice. It's an adult's view of what kids get up to.

JP: There are adults in the early strips?

MD: You do get grown-ups occasionally but I think he gave up with grown-ups because he thought they were a bit of a dead loss. They're not terribly humorous for a start. You didn't need it. Every now and again you get Maisie's mum's voice. Wellington didn't have one. It's never actually said but he is, he's on his own.

I don't think he ever actually thought of Wellington as being an orphan, Wellington's just a small boy who for the sake of a cartoon strip lives on his own. He doesn't feel sorry for himself and all the rest of it. Here's a strange thought: You'll have to put this thought to my mother but she'll probably tell me I'm talking crap. It might almost have been a reflection of the way he might have come to think of himself. Because his father died when I was 13 by which time he'd been doing the strip about four years, although Wellington had always been an orphan. As I say, he didn't get on terribly well with his mother. He loved his mother as a boy should, as they say, and did what he could, but she was very, very difficult, very manipulative woman. Maybe that thought's wrong. I don't know. Maybe it's because Wellington really wasn't a child, Wellington was, you know …

JP: They're all equally capable of mischief and kindness.

MD: They're all human beings. Maisie's capable of being mean and grasping and all the rest of it. My father would not read Schultz, he wouldn't read *Peanuts* simply because he couldn't afford to read *Peanuts* in case somehow or other the joke slipped through and that he couldn't go for so he used to avoid it. Which is a trifle unfortunate in one way because he missed out on a lot of fun but you can look at other cartoons.

The old man used to go in for lots of puns. Another thing - he had a friend called Jack Allum who was a car salesman who until recently used to run a place over in Staines called Richardsons where they used to buy and sell used MGs and they had an acre of spares in the back. It was an acre of old cars and you could go and unbolt bits and he'd then charge you for the privilege. One of Dad's things was he always liked sports cars. He used to have a beach buggy which is where you got all those beach buggy jokes in the strip. He had this beach buggy sprayed and painted with 'The Perishers' all on the front bonnet and on the back. And he used to drive about and off-road on this bloody thing. He'd clean it and polish it and then he'd go and drive over the gravel pits of Shepperton and get it covered in mud and shit and then come home and clean and polish it again. He used to drive this thing to work and back. Eventually my mother decided they had to get something decent because she wasn't going to get into this car. It didn't have doors so in order to get in you had to sit over the panelwork and because my mother's got a slightly dodgy leg she couldn't do what the old man could do. The old man could step into the car and sit down. She couldn't. She had to slide her arse over and of course she'd end up with her legs sticking up in the air which is a trifle embarrassing for a woman of a certain age. So she finally decided she wasn't going to do this with this car. So he bought an MG. He always had this fixation about having sports cars. He never liked ordinary saloon cars. He thought you're either going to have a fun car or you'll have a useful car. So it was either an estate car because you could get loads of stuff into it - Easel, paints and all the rest of it - not that he did much painting, not in the middle part anyway. Or a sports car. So he

went off and bought this sports car from this place over in Staines where he met this guy Jack Allum. And then Jack got him to do some advertising mostly by doing a deal on a car. We all ended up with sports cars from this place. Poor old Jack ended up supplying the whole bloody family with cars. But he got lots and lots of good, free advertising out of it. And of course this led to a number of things. One, my father watched the way Jack sold cars. And Jack didn't sell cars. What he would actually do is tell you you couldn't have what you wanted or you didn't want what you wanted. Until you were prepared to pay him almost any money for what you didn't want or what you couldn't have. And he put it to my father once – he said "You can't claim I'm lying, I'm not – I'm honestly dishonest". And Wellington said that once when Marlon's actually got the money for a car and Wellington says "Well, there's the car" and Marlon says "No, no, you've got to *sell* me the car!".

It was syndicated in the States, it was syndicated in Australia. We still get emails from people in Australia and New Zealand. The syndication added to the income because my father got a share of the syndication. I think he got 50% which is when he was doing the strip on his own and 26 different countries had it and it was doing quite well. Except, as all these things do, they have their phases and then if papers aren't doing terribly well they start looking for ways to cut costs. Which is why they lost the 'Sunday Mirror' because Eve Pollard decided she didn't like cartoon strips so they junked it. This is the problem with editors and journalists. They make decisions on the hoof and very often they don't think through the consequences of what they're doing. The result is they fire somebody and then they end up paying hundreds of thousands of pounds because they haven't bothered to read the contract. The other thing you tend to get is editors have groups of people they know and trust so when you get an editor move from one paper to another, especially in the nationals, they tend to try and poach all their favourite trusties to go and work with them. This is happening in 'The Telegraph' at the moment where there's been a huge influx of people from Associated Newspapers.

The problem with the syndication was that Robert Maxwell, when he took over the Mirror Group, sold all sorts of things off. He sold off the syndication but he subsequently bought it back. The unfortunate thing was when he bought it back he stopped paying my father. Maxwell was the biggest fucking crook on the planet. He plundered the bloody pension fund and robbed his own staff blind. And one of the things was he robbed my father of his syndication money, he just never got paid. When my father died he had started suing the Mirror Group for unpaid syndication because he suddenly thought he was a bit desperate for the money. So I had to carry on.

I think my father was very lucky in some ways because, yes, he was very talented but I think it was a strip of its time. And I don't think it would have lasted as long as it did had it started 25 years later. We were actually quite pleased that they stopped it when they did. The 'Mirror' owns the copyright and they would have the right to hire another artist, hire another writer, bring it back and all the rest of it. My understanding from The Mirror Group is they have no intention of doing that and the reason they stopped the strip was because my father had written it and the strip was my father. And he's a one-off. There's nobody with quite his same thought processes or quite his same attitude to life or anything else. So they stopped it. And unfortunately all the syndication stopped before. I think it might have still been appearing in a couple of places but I don't know where because when we tried to contact the syndication department it's part of a communications company so they don't communicate with people. Fairly average.

JP: Were galleries/interviews ever interested?

MD: No, because he didn't own the copyright. Dennis Collins actually owned the copyright in all the artwork that he did but he assigned that to my father in his will which was very kind of him. So all the original strips of Dennis Collins' artwork were assigned to my father. He didn't require any payment for them at all, he just gave them to him as his bequest. Which was extremely kind of him. Although they didn't see each other very often Dennis used to come down twice a year for lunch with Bill Herbert who was the Cartoons Editor and my father. And then after Bill Herbert there was another Bill. But both of these Bills used to take Dennis and my father out for a good lunch. And when I say a good lunch I mean a good lunch with a huge quantity of drink and then they'd probably go off to some pub or other and all the rest of it. My father loved it. He thrived on that sort of thing. He liked going out, he loved good food, he loved good company, he loved the socialising and he loved the drinking. Poor old Dennis couldn't cope. So Dennis would have to be poured onto a train and he'd already be suffering from a hangover before you actually got him to Liverpool Street or wherever he had to go. I think he used to find these quite terrifying but he and my father got on very well even though they didn't see each other very often. Dennis understood my father's thought processes and he knew exactly what my father wanted. They never had arguments about the way Dennis drew things, never. They worked like that except they weren't like that, they were at opposite ends of the bloody country. Dennis died comparatively young, he was only in his 60s. My mother might have some trace of an address, I'll ask her. I know that Dennis left the copyright and all the artwork he'd done for the strip to my dad so my dad could make some money out of it. He was still working on the strip until the day he died, dreaming up yet more new jokes. But he had more time after he'd stopped doing the final artwork because it was becoming one hell of a strain on his eyesight.

Appendix Three: Interview with Dr Judy Collins – Tuesday 27th November 2012

JC: I don't have many records because my father was a non-materialist person and he gave the original *Perishers* away, the ones we he had left, to the University of Kent and then he sold 20 bundles at Sothebys in the 70s and I can't remember why he did that but my mother who was a great tidy-upper probably said you don't need these anymore, and because he had donated some. There were 20 bundles which is all I know but I don't think … They're not all in the albums.

Family background: The father, Frank Collins, was a silversmith and that was the family home. And they were very proud of this man, John Collins, a Chartist, who spent a year in jail with William Lovett a toolmaker and that is the Chartist beliefs. And I only knew this when my father died, he never spoke of it, but he was always for the working man and always for pacifism and unions, but only when I worked at the Tate and my father was dead did a Raymond Fowler from Birmingham ring up and he was doing a PhD on John Collins. I have got the details but we had a copy of that silverpoint up at home and I was always told that this was a great relative. He's rather smart for a toolmaker don't you think? But that tells you that generation were very, very good with their hands and a couple of generations down my grandfather Frank was a great silversmith, and made detailed fantastic candlesticks, some of which must be in the City of Birmingham collections. The manual dexterity that I know see my father inherited was incredible, and my father had two sisters Beatrice who was disabled with polio so had one of those terrible caliper things, and she was a housewife, and then there was Joan Eileen. My father was in the middle and it went Beatrice, Dennis, Joan Eileen. And Joan Eileen turned out to be a potter and a writer. She only recently died and that was because she was a chain-smoking, whisky-drinking girl and they put her in a home, they took the whisky and the cigs off her and she died within three weeks. So there was all this making things, but I think my father studied graphic design at Birmingham College of Art rather than painting.

JP: Eric Hall remembers a painting of a nude at a mirrored vanity table called Ennui with a man leaving the room.

JC: They were very, very weird, surrealist paintings, rather sexy with naked witches dancing round a fire, moon ... I've lost them all, I don't know where they are, I haven't even got photos. They were very strange things but what he really adored was the British watercolour tradition. If there was ever a show of David Cox, Cousins, [Thomas] Gurtin, he thought they were just … and he did very, very good watercolours. But he'd take me to galleries if there was a show on of English watercolours. And I actually think now you've said the naked woman painting I think he liked those sort of Gerald Brockhurst etchings are they, those sort of 1920s and thirties,

when he was learning, those slightly sexy, strange sort-of Edward Hopper-y women, a bit of ennui, and they were never kicking their legs up. There was a sort of slightly sad melancholy.

JP: Almost noirish, proto-noir.

JC: Yes, that's what his work was like. But then he admired Gurtin's White House and seascapes.

JP: But then the very Tennielesque illustrative line that comes from *Punch* cartoons?

JC: Oh? He never mentioned him. But the detail in some of the things. When do we think *Duffy and Drusilla* was then?

JP: It's only really mentioned in his biographical notes in the first *Perishers Omnibus* where he says 'First there was *Duffy & Drusilla*'.

JC: Well, that was what my father hawked around. I can remember.

JP: So he would have written that. And this was post-*Hylda Baker's Diary*.

JC: Yes, and I have no idea how that came about.

JP: I have only seen one reprint of that.

JC: And where was it?

JP: In a little Denis Gifford Encyclopaedia of Comics.

JC: I don't know how they got the relationship, because we went to Blackpool and saw her. And she was thrilled, but I don't quite know how it came about. But that preceded everything. That was my first knowledge of him doing things. And that ran a short time, I think. I would have thought a year or two at the most. And then I remember Duffy and Drusilla because my mother said the name would never catch on. And Duffy was duffel coat, which is why when you said I thought 'how wonderful' and he did two proper, cartoon-size things (samples) of them, and I thought they were lovely because they were older than me, they were just teenager-y and rather sort of stylish. She had a lot of hair and Duffy, the boy, had the duffel coat.

JP: So more like an American comic strip, not quite Archie, sort of high school.

JC: A little bit, yes, because my father wrote lots and lots of stories for children which were pre-Harry Potter. Sadly, I threw them all away. And there were always maps, buried treasure, wizards, poor sod (laughs). And they had slightly more teenage-y children doing things.

JP: But this would have been just after C S Lewis, I suppose.

JC: Yes, that's right. So he was always in … We had a bit of money so we always an extra bedroom besides a guest bedroom. So he either had the bedroom or ... I can't quite work it out.

JP: And this was Manor Avenue?

JC: 9 Manor Drive, he had a big, big bedroom with a sink and everything. In fact he had the Master Bedroom and he and my mother were in the smaller room and I was in the smaller one so he was upstairs doing *The Perishers*.

JP: Yes, Eric Hall remembers it as 'a second floor walk-up'.

JC: Eric Hall must have been to the house!

JP: Yes, that's where the studio was!

JC: Yes, but prior to that we were in a smaller house and there was a small bedroom and he didn't like it. He worked on an ironing board in the bedroom so he took a studio in Grange Road in Birkenhead which was the nearest big town which he loved because he loved to get out of the house.

JP: I imagined that the studio was at Manor Drive and he worked at home a lot of the time.

JC: Yes, he had the radio on constantly. Radio 4 just constantly. He smoked. A pipe. Meerschaums. Wonderful things. I don't know whether he had ever smoked cigarettes as a lad but when I begun to notice he was always doing that tamping and my mother hated it which was one of the reasons he took a studio away from the house.

JP: So, the pacifism during the war was part of the humanism. He was presumably a conscientious objector?

JC: Yes, there was a strange religious undercurrent. He did read the Bible, he knew it well, I think a kind of Methodism. But he got a terrible magazine delivered called The Plain Truth. Which was all about disasters and how you can save the world by praying. My mother used to throw it out. If she got hold of it before he did it was in the bin. And he always used to ask me to read it and discuss it with him.

JP: Did he understand or accept its slightly fringe-y, sort of oddball nature.

JC: Yes, and I think he rather liked that. And he did think we were all sinners.

JP: Singers!?

JC: Sinners. You know, that kind of Methodist Chartism, you know, 'You've got to help the world and you've got to save the world'. There was a little undercurrent of that.

JP: Because Maurice Dodd was driven by his Catholicism but when he was younger he was in something that grew out of the Kibbo Kift, an offshoot of the Scouts Movement.

JC: Two strange men, then, weren't they. They phoned each other a lot, they were very happy chatting on the phone.

JP: And they had these infamous, twice-yearly …

JC: The 'Mirror' called them together with the ... I met the man the head of cartoons, and I met – who did *Andy Capp*?

JP: Reg Smythe.

JC: Yes, I met him once. My father liked *Andy Capp*, my father loved *Peanuts*. I think he once wrote to Charles Schulz, as he did admit a fanship of that. Because Maisie and Marlon weren't – I never thought they were funny! (laughs)

JP: No (laughs).

JC: And last year, 2011, I decided that I had got some rather treasured things which is everything that my father had at Briggens, which is where Station 14 was. Briggens is the stately home just inside Hertfordshire and it was all the forging and map-making. He was there with a lot of poles and he learnt Polish. But he did a cartoon and I had got them all in a great big container so these are in the Imperial War Museum under his name. And they're thrilled because they've got some Briggens things. And prior to that I found his map-making. I think when he joined the army they found he was completely hopeless. He wouldn't pick up a gun and he couldn't run so they put him on map-making and found he was a genius and they sent him on a map-making course to the area of north Wales called Dinas Bran. There are bits that are all about that. I think he was in something like the Royal Engineers but the map-makers then realised his manual dexterity. The map-making course the Army sent him on because they knew he couldn't fight so they thought he'll be able to ... work out … well, I suppose they would have sent him on to the front line. I never asked him. He went on a map-making course before they then sent him on to Station 14 and he used to say it was the best few years of his life. He was away from my mother, my poor mother had to survive the war.

JP: Oh, they were already married.

JC: Yes, they married in 1936 so I couldn't be born 'til ... but he absolutely adored that. Anyway, the cartoons he did at Briggens are superb and he signed them 'Kol', and if you went and looked at those they would show you the wicked sense of humour with all the FANYS and the … there was a naughty side to him that somehow is slightly evident there which was damped down by my teetotal Welsh mother. You can tell at times he wished that he wasn't so damped down but he was so gentle. She was teetotal so he could only have a beer every now and then and I wasn't allowed anything so I would go and drink gin from a very early age.

JP: Where I grew up in Eastbourne my best friend's father was a professional cartoonist who worked for things like Lion and Tiger, and the parents were both Welsh and the father was a big drinker.

JC: On the wedding certificate you will see that my father married 'beneath' him because the house in Sutton Coldfield was a really big house with a big garden and a gardener and you could tell there was money. And my mother's father was a railway carter who rode horses and dragged things around. And I think they met because my father had to lodge in Birkenhead when he was working in Liverpool. I think it must have been cheaper. And I think they met at a dance. And the Welsh side were a little bit poorer. And my aunt Joan Eileen couldn't stand my mother, they just didn't get on, because the aunt drank. But my mother curtailed my father a little bit.

JP: And she only had one hand?

JC: Yes, and in fact he has put that [on the wedding certificate], he says 'amputated'. And I think that, because she was disabled, a pretty woman, but because he had a disabled sister,

Beatrice with the leg-irons, I think he was able to cope with a disabled person very well. He thought 'Oh, I can take her on'. Because actually it's quite hard. I was told they only had one child because she said 'I've only got one hand so if I've got you in one arm I can't do anything else'. So – his love of Wales was partly - my mother was Welsh and he loved languages so he learnt Welsh to court her so when I was a small child they would speak Welsh and I would hate it.

JP: So you never learnt?

JC: Load of rubbish. And then he could do French and German, and a bit of Polish. So the Welsh thing was partly he loved the fact that she was Welsh but the map-making course in Dinys Bran. Something happened to him in those early years of the forties that he fell into a romantic reverie. He befriended a family called the Fieldhouses and he kept in touch with them. He was like a sort of godfather to that family and he kept in touch with them all the time. And he kept saying 'We don't want to live on the Wirral in Cheshire, we want to go near Dinas Bran' and my mother would go 'No, we don't!'. So his Welshness was stronger than hers as it were. He had got this Neo-Romantic 1940s … the land, and Dinas Bran had a castle. So he had got all this Harry Potter kids with maps and treasure and Welsh hillside …

JP: Because there's no fantastical element to *The Perishers*. One of the most interesting things about it is the agglomeration of landscapes because Maurice Dodd sketched out very rough breakdowns to be followed. I don't know how detailed they were in terms of gasworks or the pipework and the tower blocks and the terraces.

JC: No, if it had four scenes a kind of biro-ed thing would come with Maurice's captions and almost Lowry-like stick figures, just nothing. And then my father would decide where he thought the captions would go. In fact, that was the first thing he did. Because the captions often had a lot in them so he'd work out where the captions would go and then he'd spend ages doing the foliage and the ... So Maurice gave him nothing.

JP: Well, it's the dialogue that paces out the strip.

JC: That's right, so Maurice didn't give him anything. It was a scratchy little bit of biro.

JP: So all that urban-ness is your father's?

JC: Oh, it's wonderful, isn't it? Yes, Birmingham and Salford and Lowry and all that dark, black ...

JP: But they're so London as well.

JC: Are they? I think of them as northern.

JP: Sometimes, there's the Manchester Ship Canal, and then next to it will be what looks like Kennington, a field of tower blocks.

JC: My father never lived in London so he wouldn't know it that well.

JP: No, it's all the underpasses and overpasses that occur. That was what I loved about it. So all the career prior to *Duffy & Drusilla* like the Bee's Seeds posters and the Littlewoods catalogues – you don't remember them or your father making that work.

JC: No, my mother and my aunt would often pose in some of the Littlewoods dresses. This is a 1946 diary and I think that sort of thing is to do with Littlewoods. Look at me there! These were in the back of this diary so I know that those were kind of Littlewoods things. She always had to hide her hand. Look at that bloody bonnet!

JP: He looks like the actor William H Macy.

JC: Really? But you see this is wonderful. 1946, the year of my birth. He's in London and he's going to Rouaux and … so he went down to London.

JP: (reads) Exhibition Tate Gallery.

JC: See, I didn't give it to the Imperial War Museum because it's too good. And it says how I was born and then very soon I'm 13 pounds, I'm absolutely huge.

JP: Friday 13th September.

JC: But those three were in the back. And this is completely enchanting. 'Dennis Collins, Commercial Artist' and this is to my mother. And that's where he was living when he met her. Because you'll learn a little bit about him. Loved gardening. Loved poetry and puns.

JP: can I ask if this is you in this strip, maybe. Because it's a really odd occurrence in a *Perishers* strip, it's just a little character pops up.

JC: Yes, because I had a coat and a beret like that. Oh, how delightful! Yes, absolutely. I looked exactly like that.

JP: It's the one time I've ever noticed anything like that in a *Perishers* strip.

JC: Probably they told him not to. I'm also a background ostrich in Paula Rego's Dancing Ostriches and I look exactly like that. Question?

JP: *Hylda Baker's Diary*.

JC: Isn't there any kind of Hylda Baker archive? In Blackpool? Because we went there and that's where we met her. And she kept saying 'She knows, you know!'

JP: That was her thing right through til the end. In terms of *The Perishers*, any understanding of the working relationship

JC: A slightly long envelope came weekly. He had to keep three weeks ahead. So if we went on holiday for a fortnight my father had to keep five weeks ahead. So he had to work around the clock and Maurice had to send … it would take him the day to get the caption in. He would move them about on a sheet of tracing paper. He once did something very important for Littlewoods when I was three which was a very important thing and I went up into the studio and scribbled on it. I can remember the complete horror. I found this red pencil and can remember the joy and a lot of trouble when I came down and said 'I've helped' or something and there was a lot of panic, because there was always a deadline for those sort of things.

Editorial Input? They would discuss a theme. I remember them discussing a theme, like in the summer they would say it's 'Eyeballs In The Sky' again, or whether Maisie was doing something or Baby Grumpling was doing something in the garden. They would say there would be about six of these. They would go in little blocks.

JP: They would tend to go in a week or two weeks. Or sometimes two weeks would set up the next week.

JC: And Old Boot had a birthday in November. And that's all I remember on the phone, that kind of discussion, but I think Bill Herbert was in charge. My father accepted what came. He was never a pushy person. So Maurice Dodd would say we're doing this and talk a little bit with my father, it would get passed, and then the captions would come.

JP: And they had weekly conversations?

JC: Very happy, jolly, chatty, friendly. Good friends.

JP: It's funny then that they only met in those bi-annual …

JC: It suited them. And now you're telling me about their war lives I don't know how much they knew about, which fascinates me. So, yes, the text would come, and my father would sort out the captions, but he would never change anything. When it came he would accept it. Even if it was difficult to fit in. He wouldn't ring him up and say it's too many words. If it had come from Maurice that was it. Because my mother was always saying; 'You can't fit that in!'. There were a lot of words.

JP: Some were incredibly, almost 60-70% text to look at, so there were phases. So you don't remember Ben Witham the first writer before Maurice Dodd.

JC: I only remember the name but nothing else. So did Baby Grumpling come from Maurice Dodd?

JP: Did your father get tired of *The Perishers*?

JC: No, loved it. Loved it. Just enjoyed it. There was a lot of scope for creativity within a very tight bit of control. The size was known. The time he had to do it in was known. The captions would come and he would spend half the day getting the captions in and then he'd just adore doing the pen and brushwork. They were sent weekly, he'd do a week's and the post office knew, because he was as regular as clockwork. He would go in and they'd go in two wooden boards, my father would pack them, but they'd almost be ready with the stamp. He had two wooden bits of plywood which just kept going back and forth and it just fitted an ironing board. Poor sod worked on an ironing board. He was as happy as Larry.

JP: Because they're large originals!

JC: Yes, they are. And because he wanted to do so much detail. He did more than was required. Definitely.

JP: I mean, when they're on the way to the beach. St Moribunds.

JC: And there was never any source material. He never would get a picture of a Gasometer.

JP: No reference, no swipe file?

JC: Nothing. It just came out. You couldn't really watch him. But you could go in afterwards and you knew that you would get that Gasometer.

JP: And the thing that I love about it was the absolute consistency and commitment to something almost unending.

JC: Yes. If my father hadn't been ill he would have gone on. He would. That's what stopped him. But he did his Mother Theresa bit, his caring bit, and that was it.

So we've done Wales, studio in Grange Road, father silversmith. Oh yes, the sister Joan Eileen wrote stories for Childrens Hour so there was always this, as I say, catering for children. I remember being made to sit and *listen* to her stories and I thought they were particularly dull. Childrens Hour, or was it Listen With Mother?

JP: I know my old English teacher's wife was the woman who narrated Muffin The Mule.

JC: Oh, crikey. But it suddenly occurred to me last night when I was thinking about you coming that Joan was writing for Childrens Hour, my father was doing all these Harry Potter kind-of or, as you say, after C S Lewis. They were completely steeped in this. She was broadcast but nothing of my fathers came about. As I say, I threw out the stories.

JP: Were these mythological stories researched?

JC: Yes, there'd be Welsh myths, there'd be Pendragon. With my father it would be Welsh myths or Caedmon. There would be old English names that would crop up because he read copiously. He just read when he wasn't working. Never watched the television.

JP: So just radio, working, and reading in the evenings.

JC: Pipe. Digging the garden in the mornings. Loved birds. Out in the morning to see the birds. Loved the natural world. Was a great cyclist as a boy with other people from school. Was a kind of Bradley Wiggins, they'd go like this. And then sport disappeared from his life.

JP: But was the bicycling for sport or was it for getting out into nature?

JC: Getting out into nature. Going around the Warwickshire lanes and just being out and in the trees. Yes, loved nature. Would take me on early morning walks when I was a little girl. Yes, make me a cup of tea and toast at six o'clock and we'd go off. And he'd say 'that's a yellowhammer, that's a …'. Yes, lovely, an absolutely divine father. Gentle, kind, and I knew how kind of squashed he was by my mother. Loved him. A good violinist. I would play the piano, and he would play and we would do Mendelsohn. A very good all-rounder really. And that's were I saw the disparity. He had a cultured background. He would talk to me about Mendelsohn and Dickens and she was much more basic. He was very fussy about everything. He had hundreds of pencils and hundreds of brushes and he had a bench made that was slightly sloped. Huge, beautiful.

JP: Was *The Perishers* pen and brushwork?

JC: He would do the outlines with a brush freehand. It was pen and brush. There were lots of lovely pens.

JP: Like dip pens?

JC: Oh god, yes. I've still got some, really stained, and my father had quite stained fingers from the ink. If we went out always wore a bow tie hand-tied silk bow tie and had long-ish hair so there was a slight hippy-ish, he wanted to grow … and the bow tie. I think he knew Charles Schulz wore a bow tie but my mother was always saying 'get your hair cut and he would say 'no, it's fine, it's fine!'

JP: Other influences - cartoons or cartoonists?

JC: His focus never went to America, it was more European. If there had been a rare Polish cartoon or a Dutch cartoon he would have been interested. Isn't it terrible? I never asked him. There was an interest in words. There was an interest very strongly in concordances in languages. Like, French for window is 'fenetre'. He would then say to me 'the welsh is fenis'-something, then he'd say 'the German is' which was something quite different. Then he would say the Indo-European-Hungarian thread went ... I would sit for lots of lectures on where a word came from and how it spread across cultures. Adored that. Adored puns.

JP: Well, Maurice Dodd's writing is full of that as well.

JC: Yes, but whether my father said 'put puns in' I don't know, because my father was always punning. And the forgery thing - he could forge a stamp, he was so good. He would occasionally make a first-class stamp. And one day a telegram from ERNIE arrived - which tells you how old that is, telegrams and ERNIE - and my mother and I danced around and then she stopped and she said – 'you made this, didn't you!'

JP: Oh, no!

JC: And he said 'I did'. So that's the naughty side of him. We'd already spent the money. But it was a proper telegram from ERNIE. With his capacity to forge he could have made an awful lot of money making banknotes. And he wasn't using that capacity which is why he suddenly made that 'we have won £25,000 on ERNIE'. Because he would say 'I do *The Perishers*' and people would often say 'and what else do you do?'. In fact, they'd usually say that – 'and what do you do for a living? And they'd say 'that's your full-time job?'. And people would be staggered.

JP: And nearing the end of *The Perishers* he would farm out the 'Eyeballs In The Sky' periods?

JC: Yes, I think he did. Because I remember seeing them once and I didn't like the drawings. Because they never really related to anything in the world, did they? They wouldn't do Churchill's death.

JP: That was one of the problems in its Mannerist phase towards the end – there would be Charlie Chaplin dancing down the street really crudely drawn by Maurice Dodd and it lost its coherence.

JC: But did it ever relate to any outside incident?

JP: There would be graffiti on the wall saying 'Wilson Out'. There would be part of the texture in the landscape that would suggest a period. And Maisie would talk about 'that nice Mr Wilson'.

Would she? Because Maisie was the one who was worldly-wise. Marlon was just hopeless and hen-pecked and Wellington just played with the dog. And Baby Grumpling just dug up works in the garden.

JP: Although he had parallel adventures. And then there was the beetles and the bugs and the Nazi tortoise, things like that.

JC: I must find out about where those Sothebys bundles went. Oh, they would have sold because they would have sold them cheaply. That would have been in the late seventies, early eighties, when my mother was beginning to be ill and probably he was getting rid of things. I had some and I think I threw them away. I had four framed and they seemed so me. Maisie screaming at people (laughs). I was a noisy child.

JP: Did you have temper tantrums then?

JC: No, I was just noisy, I was busy and noisy. And also it was very difficult at school when one was twelve and it was quite popular.

JP: It was known in the playground then?

JC: Yes, yes, so I didn't enjoy that. They used to say 'You're *The Perishers* .. the original Perisher'. What else can I tell you?

JP: Just knowing that it never became a chore is really interesting.

JC: If the cancer hadn't killed him and my mother hadn't knocked(?) him, actually it was his 99th birthday this year. Oh, no, it was his 100th birthday. He was born in 1912. I remember buying a really expensive bottle of champagne and saying 'thankyou'. He'd have carried on.

JP: So he was about 45-46 when he started *The Perishers* so quite old?

JC: Yes. Well, I had come along really, so they had got a small child that had a private education.

JP: So in fact by the time he had finished it … he was working nearly into his seventies?

Yes, because he was fine. His fingers were fine, his eyes were fine. Oh, he'd got bad eyes actually, he had quite strong glasses.

JP: They do get sketchier through the last few years. But there's an argument that actually shows total comfort with the form.

JC: Because your readers will know. And also I know my mother always said ‘there’s too much detail in it and you take too long’. I actually think Bill Herbert used to say ‘you could put less detail in it’. They said ‘you could simplify it’ but he wouldn’t. Because that’s what he enjoyed.

JP: I think that’s a very British quality as well.

JC: Yes, it is. Because even Peter Brooks now.

JP: I think Giles did it better.

JC: Oh God, now that’s who my father liked. He would always say ‘these are superb’. Yes, he admired Giles. So that’s a very British thing. No, he never looked to America. Although, as I say, he would look at European things. And he was always going on about a Dutch great, great, great aunt called Johanna van der Kloen. And whether she was an artist or something but he sort of admired this woman and I’ve never bothered to look her up. Which was why I think when he started doing the cartoons at Briggens he went ‘K.O.L.’ so one might find something interesting there.

Appendix Four: List of additional material submitted for *Viva* exhibition

Research outcomes in the form of artifacts, exhibitions and publications have been disseminated at key stages throughout the process and dates and contexts of dissemination are noted below.

Table Summarising Research Outputs:

Date	**Title**	**Presentational Context**
2008	*Dracula*	Artists' Book, pub. Four Corners Books
2009	*The Adventures of Lionel: The Book of Hours*	Artists' Project, *Esopus* Magazine 12
2009	*The Novel of Nonel & Vovel,* written by Oreet Ashery & Larissa Sansour	6-page comics commission for artists monograph, pub. Charta
2010	*The History of 'Premier Comics'*	Artists Project, www.creative time.com
2010	*James Pyman*	Solo Exhibition, Maureen Paley Gallery
2012	*The Upper Mill*	Installation, Hepworth Gallery Wakefield
2013	*Project*	Gallery Text & Exhibition, Maureen Paley Gallery
2016	*The Scruffy Herberts*	PhD Practice-Based Research Artists' Publication
2016	*The Perishers Missing Strips*	PhD Practice-Based Research Draft Publication

Appendix Five: 'The Scruffy Herberts' Publication (38 pgs.) – Practice-Based Submission

The appended publication '50 Years of the *Scruffy Herberts*' is a collation of much of the practice-based research element of the PhD. It takes the form of an anthology published by fictional newspaper 'The People's Face' to commemorate a half-century of the invented *Scruffy Herberts* strip's history from 1950-2000. This draft or 'contingent' format means it can represent the creative investigation of the history of *The Perishers* to date while still leaving the potential for future iterations and presentations of the creative material. The original artwork, together with other visual elements and memorabilia, can also be shown in an exhibition context alongside other artwork as an expanded presentation of my practice.

Through researching *The Perishers* and, by extension, the history of other 'Daily Mirror' newspaper strips, there has emerged a curatorial space to further investigate the creative overlaps between aspects of comics history and fine art. My research has identified gaps in the established knowledge of source material and subsequent adaptations or appropriations. Taking Chester Gould's newspaper strip *Dick Tracy* as an example, accepted art historical understanding would acknowledge the original strip, Andy Warhol's 1960s painting and Art Spiegelman's 1970s collages as the principal artefacts related to the character. However, a more complex lineage would also include the *Mad* Magazine parodies by Wally Wood and Mel Collins' contemporaneous collages as cited in this thesis. In addition, there is the British *Dick Tracy*-influenced *Buck Ryan* in the 'Daily Mirror' to consider as both a commercial by-product of *Tracy* and a long-running creative property with its own distinctive textual and visual aesthetic. Presenting all this material together would provide a deeper analysis of the different processes and creative reconsiderations related to a single creative source text.

Whereas previous public gallery exhibitions examining the relationship between comics and fine art have been either general surveys or themed around subjects (such as the British Library's 'Comics & Anarchy' or the Hayward Gallery's touring 'Cult Fiction'), newspaper comics strips have not been the specific focus of exhibitions to date. The 'Scruffy Herberts' research material and artwork could create a template for new curatorial possibilities in two ways. Firstly, as with *Dick Tracy* it forms a creative link between original strips, historical pastiches from *Mad* Comic and underground comics through to the work of contemporary practitioners such as Spiegelman and Chris Ware. Secondly, new research is then added to existing historical, critical and creative knowledge.

A further output was also produced as part of the research but is not present here. This was a 100-page collation of unpublished strips downloaded from the British Newspaper Library digital archive. It functions as a draft proposal for the first of a possible series of new publications

reprinting newspaper strips from high-quality scans of the original newspapers for the first time with new biographical and critical texts.

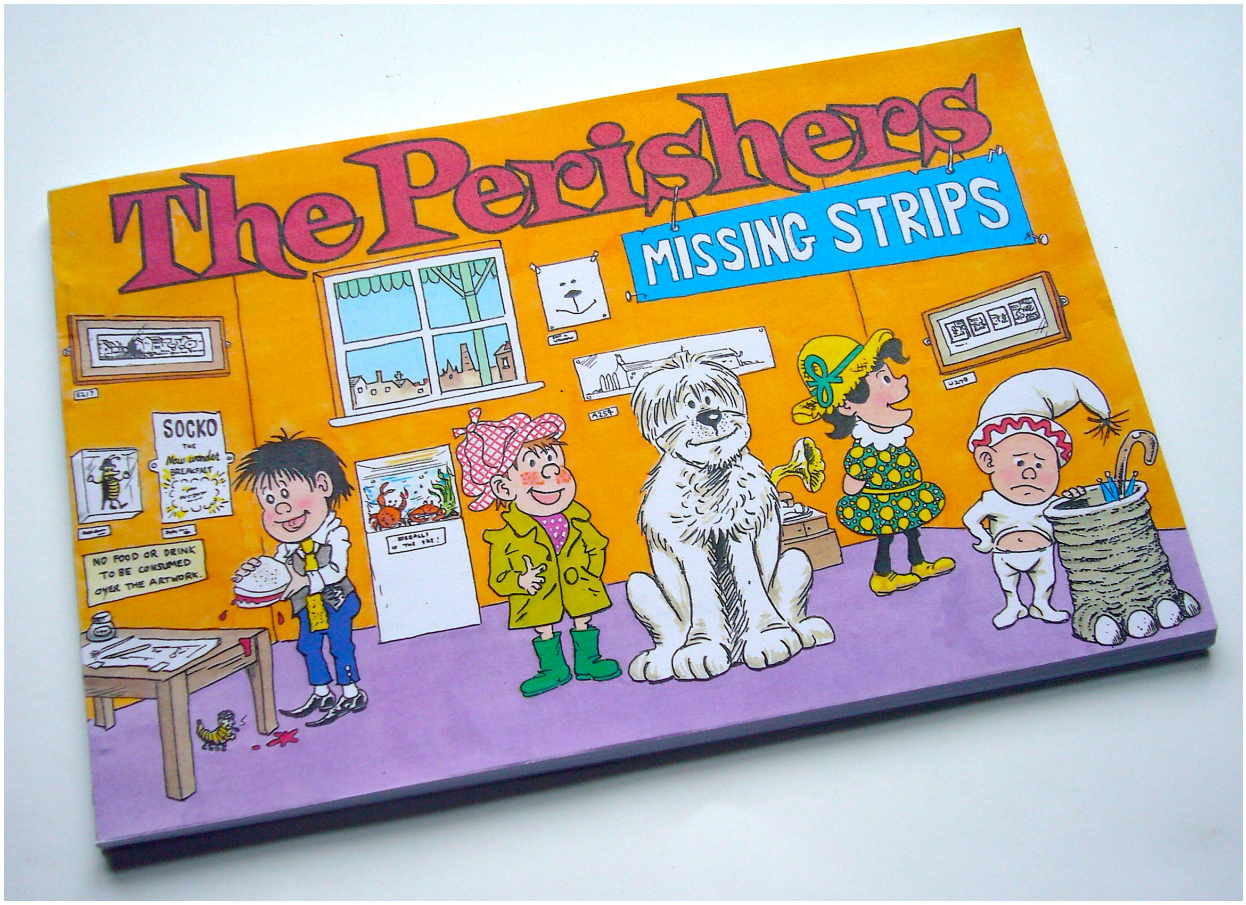

Fig A.1 James Pyman, *The Perishers Missing Strips* (front cover), 2016

The text in this draft is a 20,000 word biography of *Perishers* creators Maurice Dodd and Dennis Collins that is an expanded version of the Chapter Two text of this thesis. There is also the possibility of producing further publications collating other unreprinted 'Daily Mirror' strips such as *Buck Ryan*, *The Flutters*, *Belinda* and *Romeo Brown* with new creative or critical texts by contemporary writers operating in similar generic forms or visual languages.

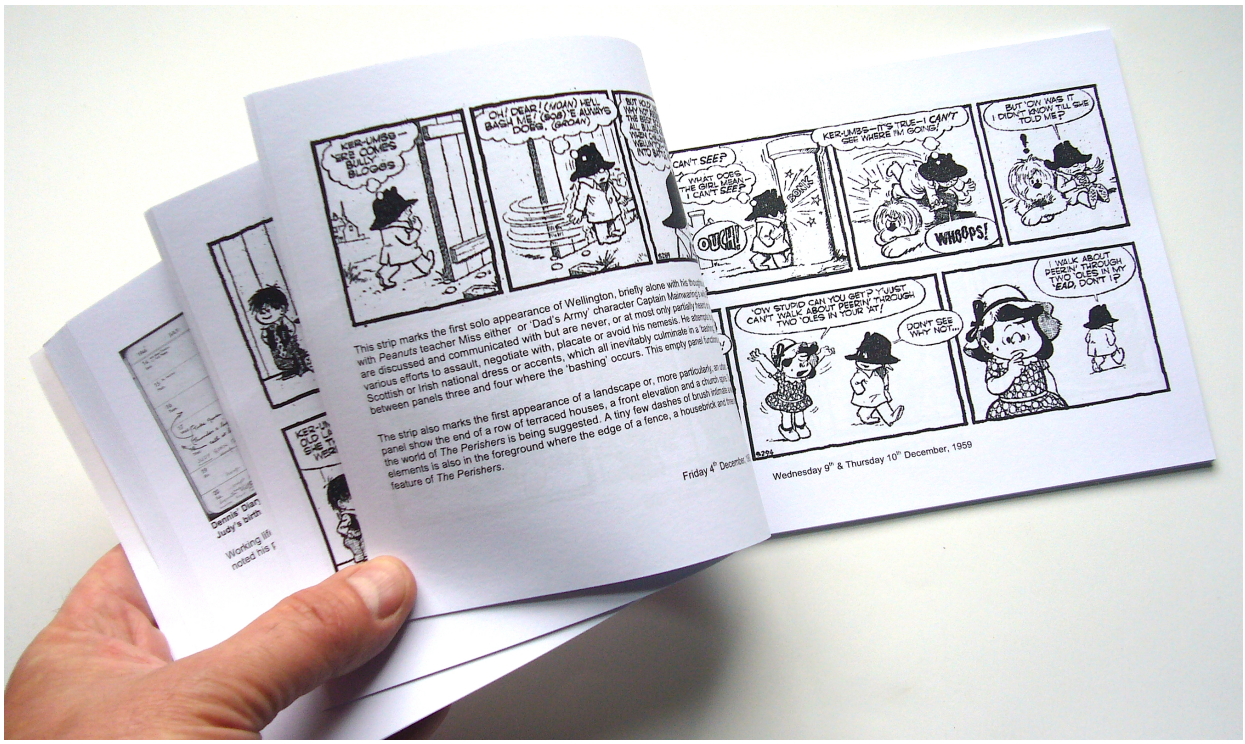

Fig A.2 James Pyman, *The Perishers Missing Strips* (interior pages), 2016

The research has also created a new area in my practice where the research has been an integral driver of the art work. Whereas past projects have adopted structures such as the editorial cartoon or the nine panel grid, the 'Scruffy Herberts' work is an attenuation of *The Perishers* and *Peanuts* that adds new readings of both the historical material and artworks that adopt pastiche and parody as creative and appropriative strategies.