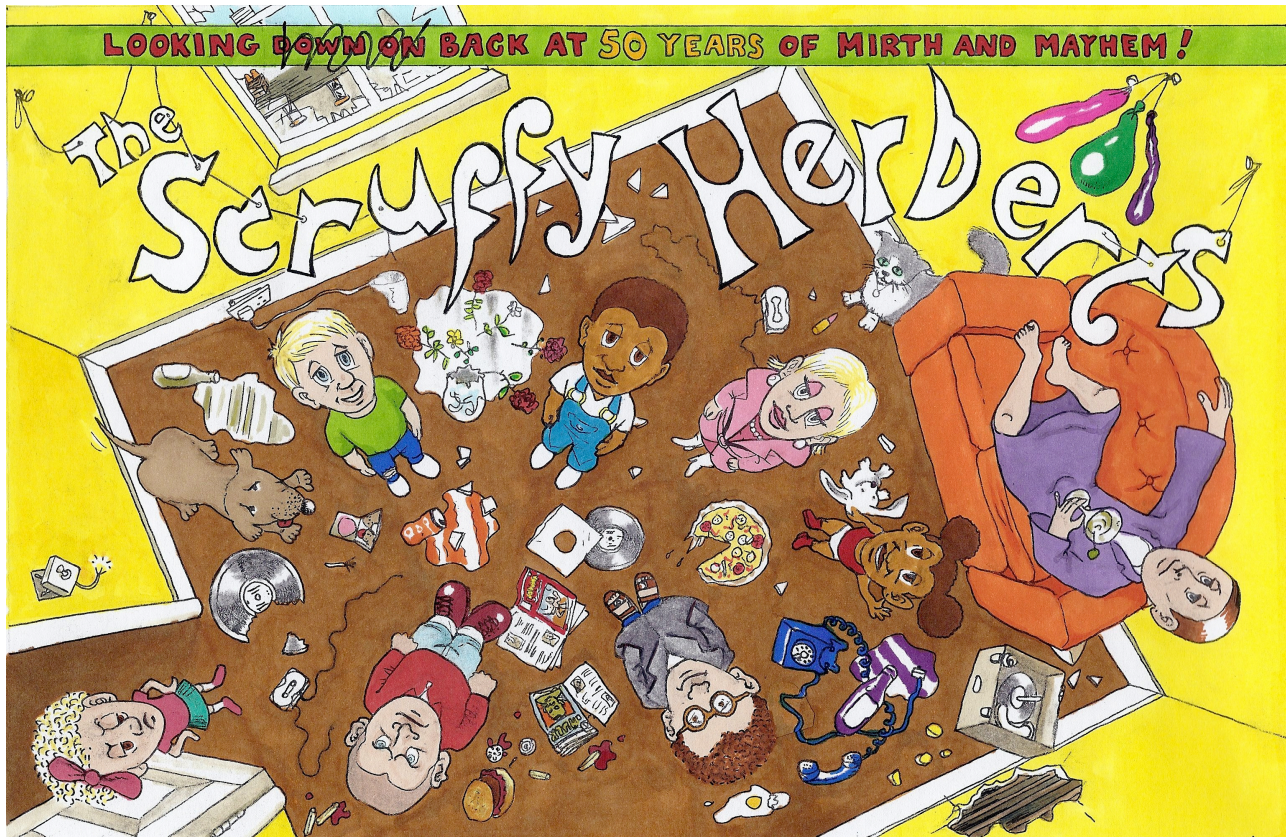


LOOKING DOWN ON BACK AT 50 YEARS OF MIRTH AND MAYHEM!

The Scruffy Herbs



This publication forms part of James Pyman's 2016 PhD by Practice Submission

'Eyeballs In The Sky!'

**The development of the verbal and visual languages of
The Perishers newspaper strip (1959-1987)**

University of Derby 2016

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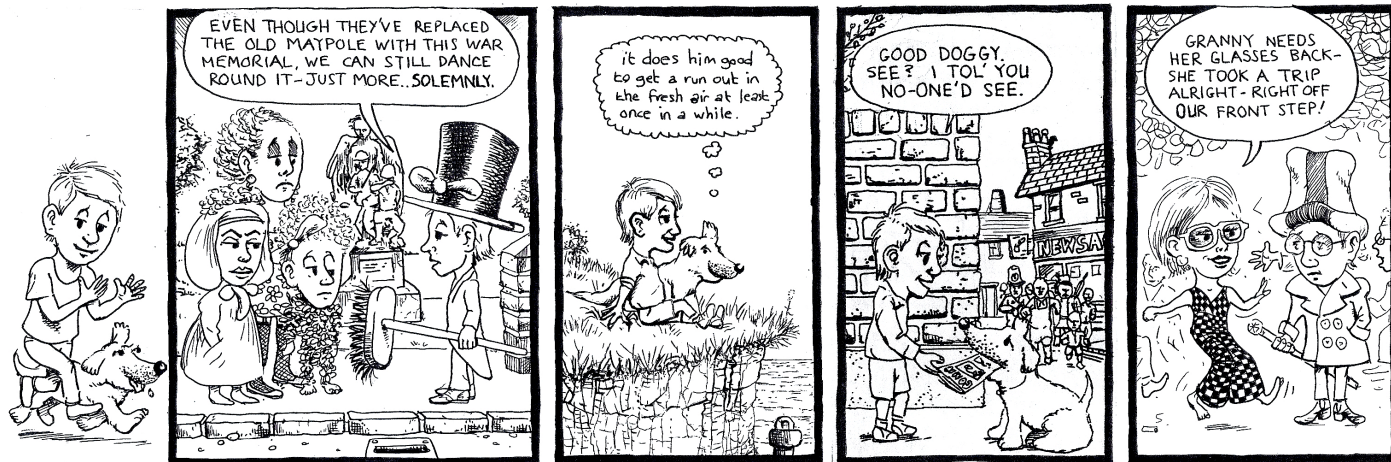
INTRODUCTION

The material in this publication has been compiled to present a selection of artwork made during my PhD study into *The Perishers* newspaper comic strip.

The publication adopts the form a tabloid newspaper book collection anthologising the historical development of a fictional comic strip called *The Scruffy Herberts* from the 1950s to the end of the 20th century.

James Pyman, October 2016

Introducing ... **Scruffy Herbert (and Barker)**



The following few pages will introduce all of *The Scruffy Herberts* regular characters, but we have to begin with the boy that give the strip its name in the first place. Meet Herbert, who since 1950 has been delivering a daily laugh to regular (and sometimes highly *irregular*) readers of 'The People's Face'. That same year also saw beginnings for cultural titans *The Gambols* newspaper strip, the *Eagle* Comic, and radio programmes Listen With Mother and The Archers, all bar one outlived by our original 'Bombsite Boy'. Funnily enough, 1950 also saw the end of soap rationing, but that evidently had little impact on the domestic lives of Herbert and his pet dog Barker ! Through it all they've stuck by each other, and as long as the newspaper survives, there's no reason why they won't celebrate their centenary in 2050. Just don't tell artist Don !

Dennis and Bunches



Dennis first arrived in the strip in 1958, homeless, broke and alone. It transpired he had been unfairly evicted from his cold-water flat in west London's Notting Hill, had wandered south and was first encountered occupying Herbert and Barker's favourite park bench by the duck pond in the recreation ground of Herbert's seaside hometown Sandsend. Little sister Bunches blew in to the strip in 1961, literally, as she came over the English Channel flying north from a Jamaican tropical storm hanging from a bunch of party balloons, a scene reprised in 1972 and shown in the first panel above. Where Den is mild and temperate, Bunches is a Caribbean hurricane !

Little Els



Little Els (or 'Precious' to her mother) first appeared on the cover of the 1957 annual collection as a member of the crowd at Herbert's skiffle band performance outside the 4-I's coffee bar. I slowly saw the potential for a lazy-eyed, oval-faced Shirley Temple lookalike and eventually introduced her into the daily strip proper in June 1959. Since that moment she has never spoken - Els is in an historical tradition of mute, or 'pantomime' cartoon characters begun with Carl Anderssen's *Henry*, and continuing through Felix the Cat and Tom and Jerry right up to Maggie Simpson. Don't mistake her silence for passivity, though - the strips selected here demonstrate her willingness to take direct action, either in retrieving Tich's football, seeking revenge for being abandoned in Nettlewood, or introducing her robot creation Mach-O to the gang. Where Els is concerned, actions speak louder than words !

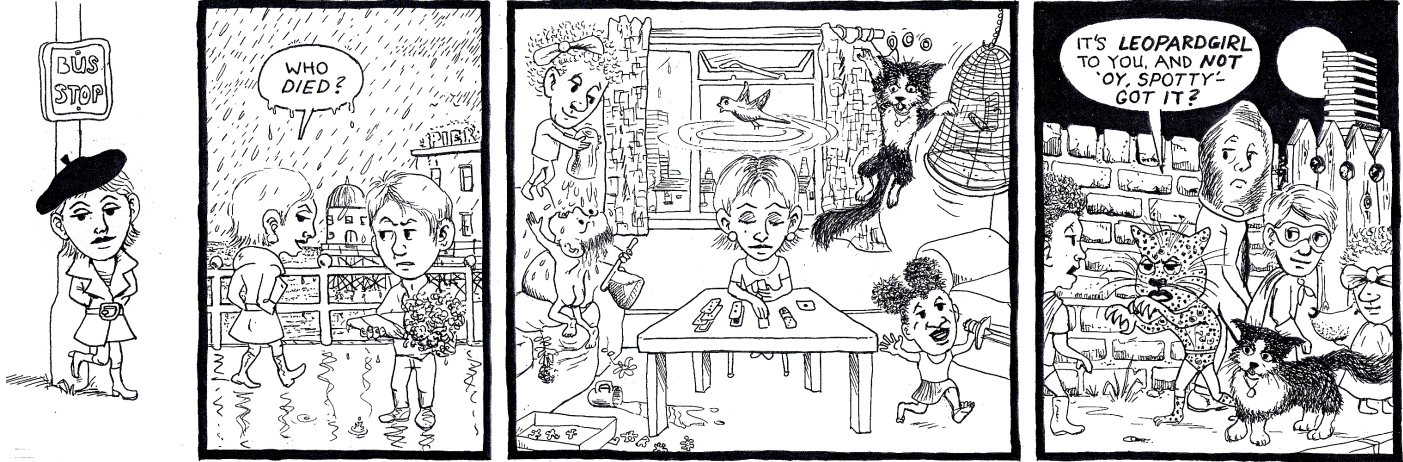
Toffeenose



Toffeenose first appeared in 1957 squatting the public toilets at Backside Park. The more mature of the Scruffy Herberts, he is cultured, refined and intellectual – not valuable attributes in the social context he finds himself in ! However, in 1967 he found himself coming into his own when he moved into a townhouse and could provide bed and board to various visiting Herberts.

Toffeenose is also endlessly supportive of the younger childrens' schemes and scrapes, as in the three examples above from 1971, 1974 and 1985 respectively.

Acid Drops



The last regular character to arrive in the strip in the 1950s*, Drops (as she's universally known) came to represent the mod girl figure that emerged from pop culture exemplified by singers Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black and Lulu. As befits her name, she's sugar-coated, can become sharp very quickly and could leave a sour taste in the mouth. She has been Herbert's closest confidante and arch nemesis, often in the same strip ... and sometimes in the same panel !

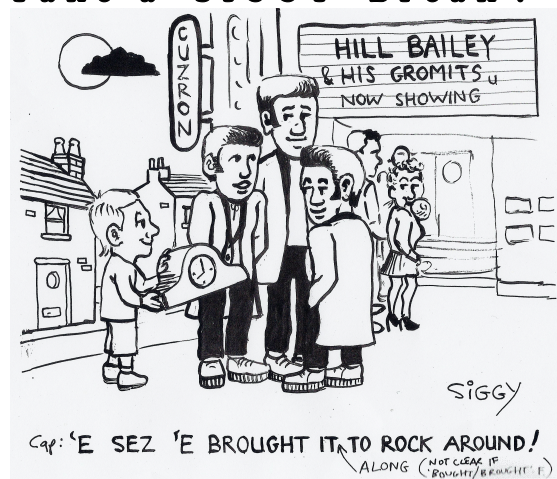
*Skin Ed doesn't count, as older (but still eagle-eyed) readers will remember he originally appeared in the strip as 'Ted' as early as 1956.

THE STRIPS

The 1950s

The birth of *The Scruffy Herberts* was not a quick, clean process; it was a messy and protracted affair that began in 1949 when I approached the 'People's Face' cartoon editor with a proposal for an adventure 'soap-opera' newspaper strip called *Bombsite Boys*. Set in London's East End, it was to feature a group of children of mixed backgrounds – an English lad called Herbert, an Irish kid called Seamus, a Maltese called Tony, and others representing the various post-war urban diaspora communities. He kept just the first name, shortening it to '*Erbert*', offered me a daily 'gag' cartoon and the rest was history, although it's notable how many of those ethnicities were eventually represented in the comic strip.

Take a 'SIGGY' Break !



I had lined Don up as artist on the proposed *Boys*, but he was still producing jokes in-house for magazine publishers Sutton St John, and was concerned his moonlighting would create problems. The pen-name 'Siggie' was decided upon, and the regular 'Take A 'Siggie' Break !' spot took over from Hunagrian émigré cartoonist's 'Giggle with Syzygy'.

The 1955 cartoon on the left shows how that proposal became a regular single gag in the 'Wit At Work' page of the 'Face.' This version shows Don's hand-lettered caption with editorial amendments prior to it being typeset. It is representative of how the early years of '*erbert*' looked, before he gained his own strip and the Scruffy sobriquet. Still a kid in short pants, he was more guileless, less streetwise than the character that would emerge later. He was clearly an orphan, and roamed around a landscape of half-demolished terraced streets and inner-city parks still visibly marked by the war.

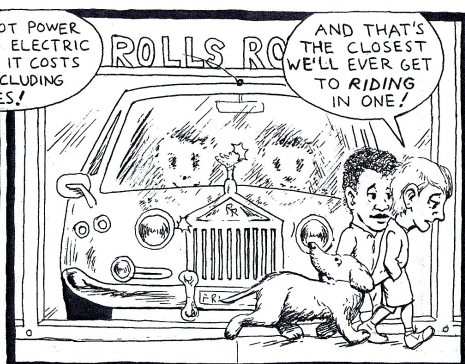
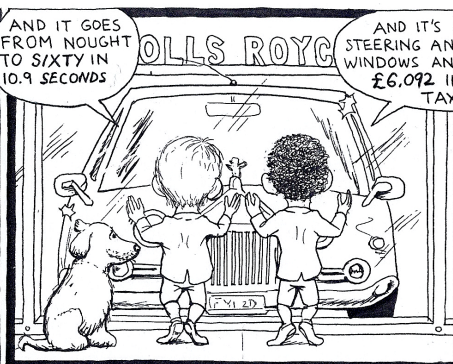
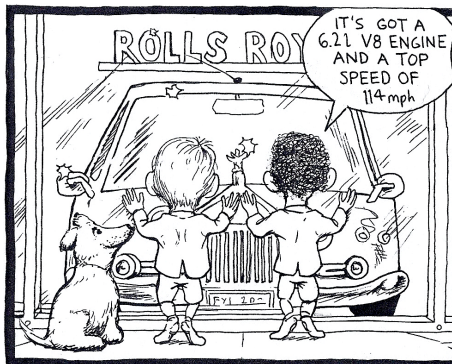
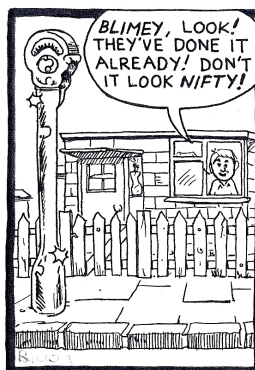
Those early years tracked a changing youth culture, from the Teddy Boys shown here, through the period of the Angry Young Men and on to the Traddlers, Beatniks and beyond, into the 1960s, the Seventies, etc ...

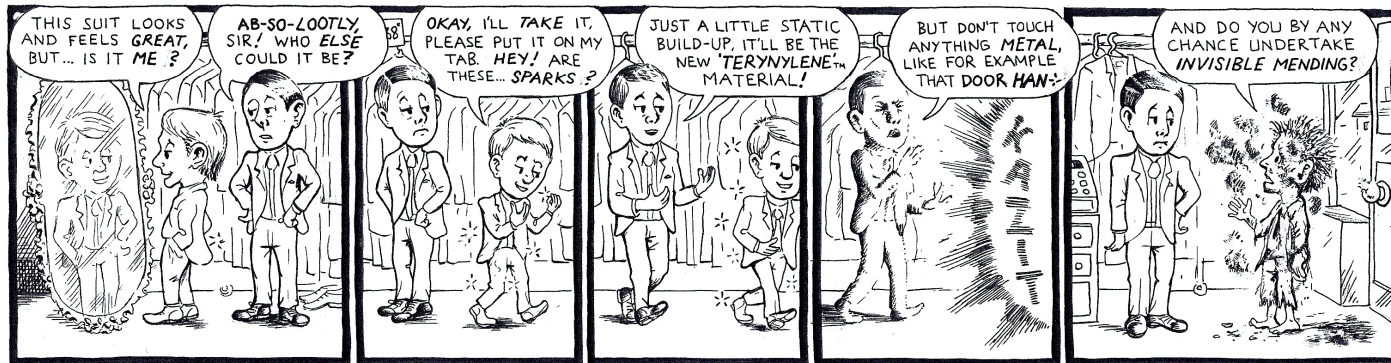
SCRUFFY 'ERBERT

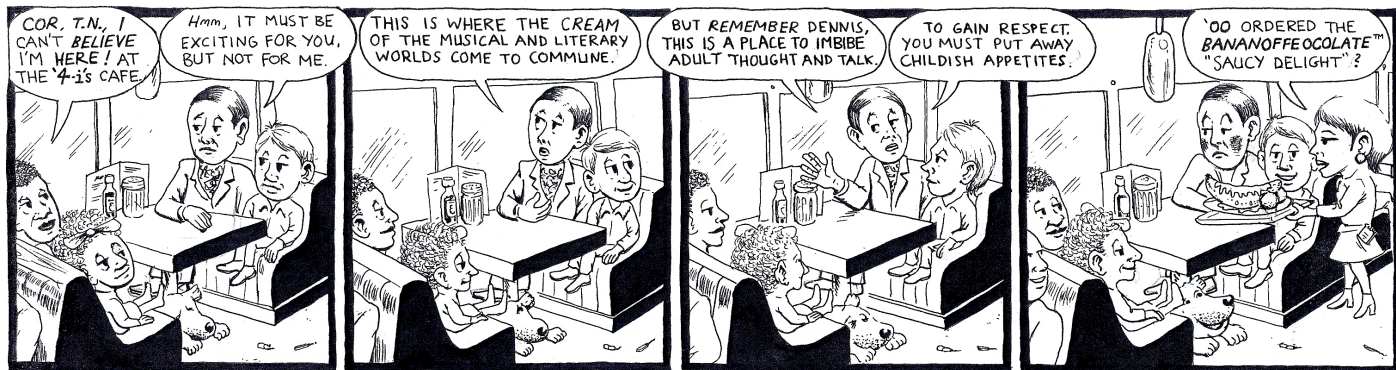


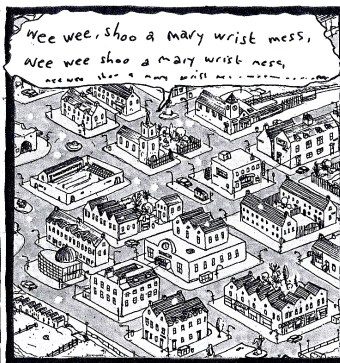
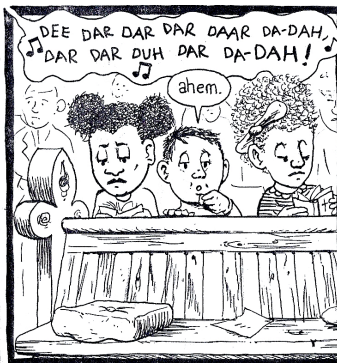
Here is the very first appearance of the *Scruffy 'Erbert* strip dated 6th June 1955. One of the rare occasions when adults are seen in the strips, the two old ladies establish an all-too common response by grown-ups to the sight of Herbert.

The following strips are merely a small sample of a sum total of around 15,000 that Don and I have produced since 1950. Strips from this first decade record such events as England's first parking meter, motoring's Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, the development of man-made fibres and the *cappuccino* coffee-bar scene (others we don't have room for covered the invention of double yellow lines, the introduction of Premium Bonds, the passing of the Clean Air Act and the inauguration of Subscriber trunk Dialling !) We'll then take you through the twentieth century decade-by-decade, with a brief stop-off to celebrate the colour annual book collections and other *Herberts* ephemera. As the cover to this book says, we're 'Looking back at 50 years of mirth and mayhem !'

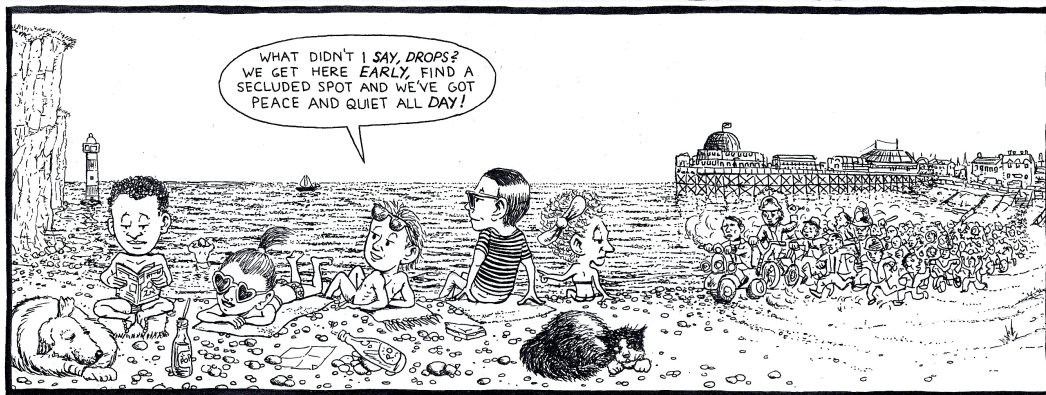
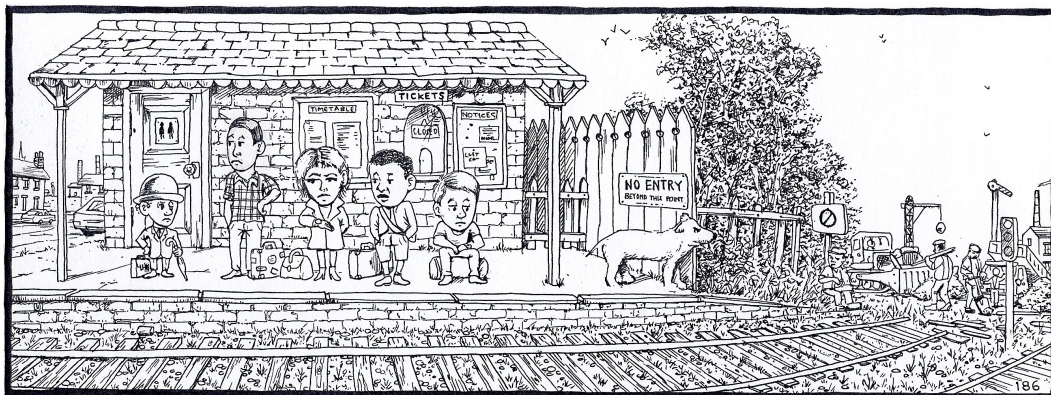


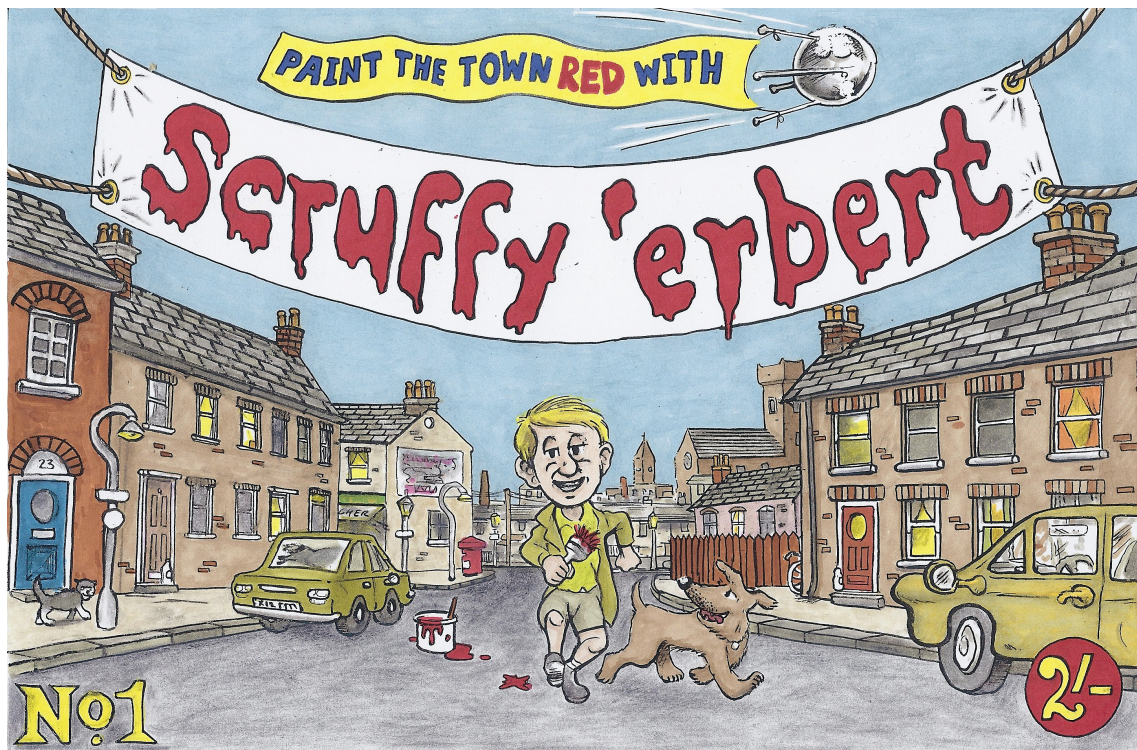




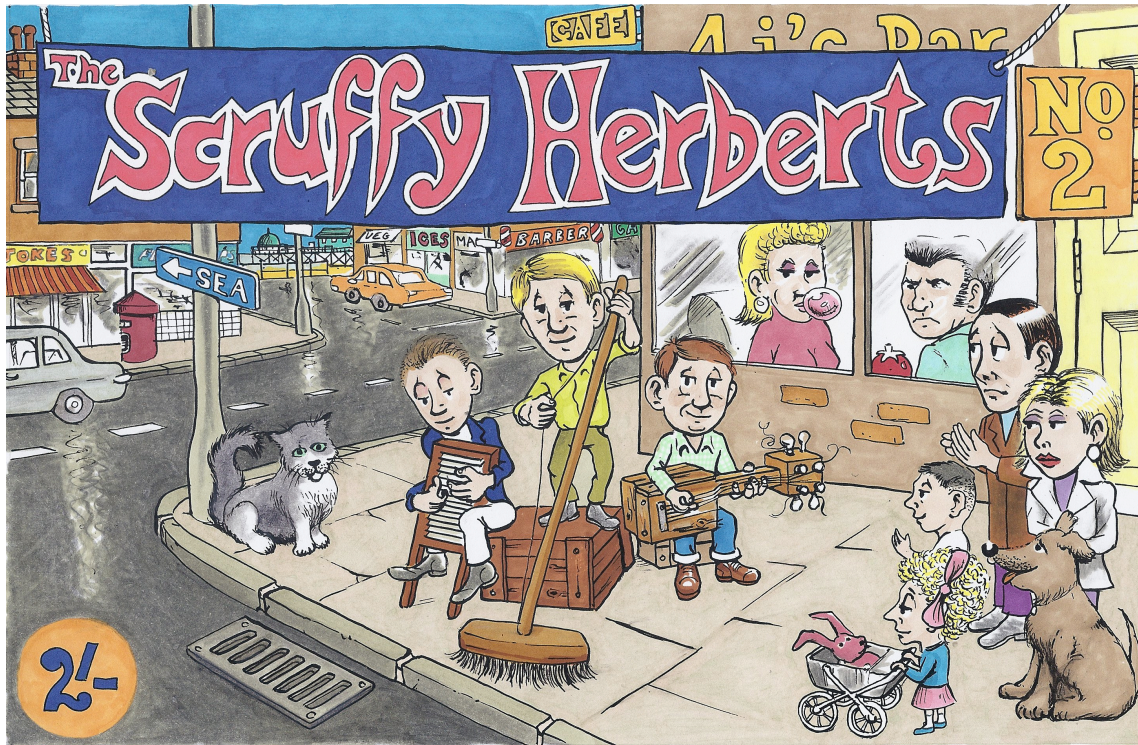


The 1960s

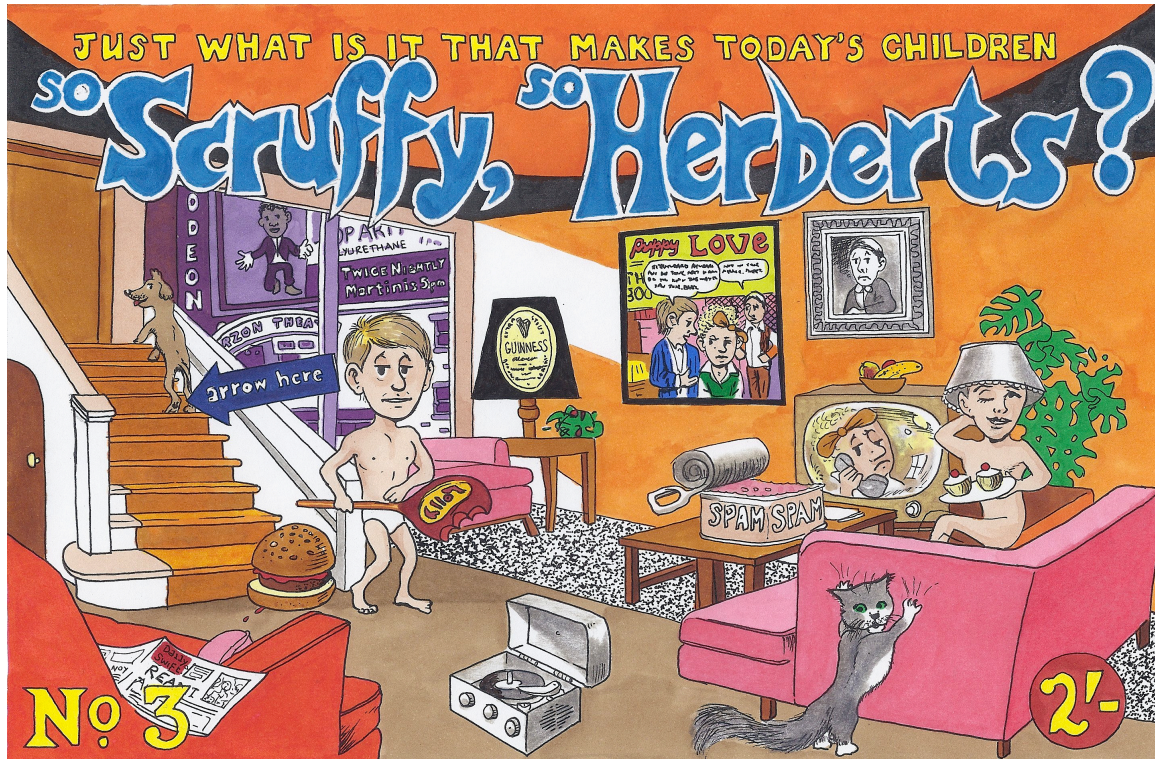




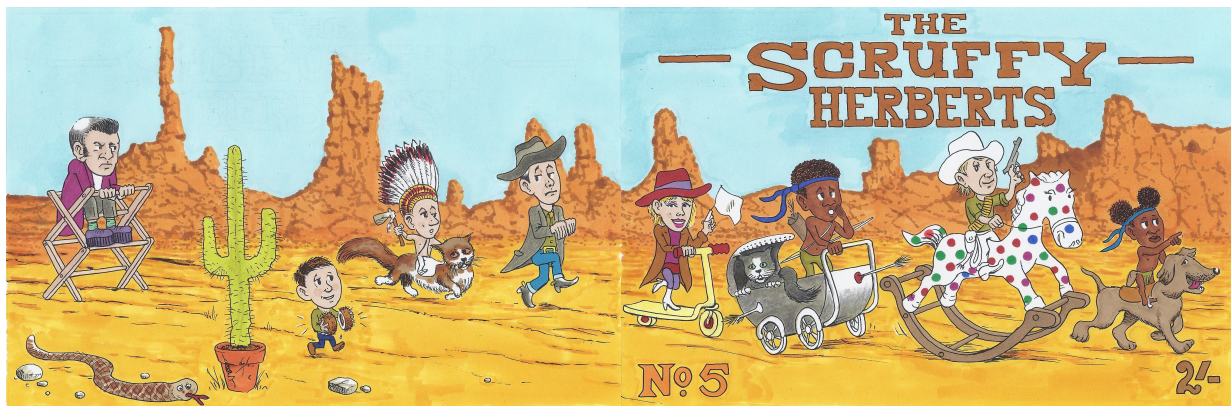
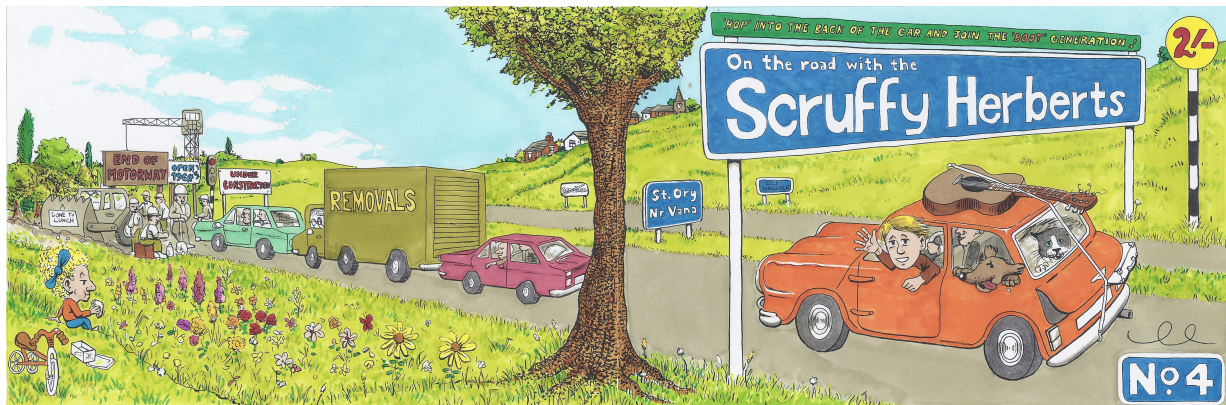
'Paint the town red with ... Scruffy 'Erbert' was the first book collection published in November 1956. It collated selected strips from the year before the name change to *The Scruffy Herberts* in January 1957, and started an annual tradition that still survives.



'The Scruffy Herberts' No. 2 (1957) saw all the main characters on one page for the first time, and for the boys in Herbert's skiffle band 'The Skiffly Herberts' this also marked their swansong. It would be three years before Little Els was given another walk-on part !



The cover of the 1958 collection was a sly reworking of a famous artwork by famous British 'pop' painter Richard Hamilton.



Opposite Top: ‘On the Road with The Scruffy Herberts’ (1959) commemorated the opening of the first stage of the M1 and prophesied the situation that has persisted – the 24-hour traffic jam !

Opposite Bottom: The Perishers Book 4 (1960) pastiched popular western film ‘The Magnificent Seven’. Eagle-eyed readers will note there are actually eight children pictured but Don evidently couldn’t leave anyone out ! Some visual punning occurred with Ted ‘riding’ a clothes horse and Tich accompanying Toffeenose on coconut-halved horse-clopping sound effects.

Below: The 1969 Annual commemorated probably the most significant event in world history, man landing on the moon ! However, readers were not under the illusion that Herbert and Dennis had made the same journey as Neil Armstrong *et al* for long. A more grounded concern was Don’s failure to draw a price on the cover, which launched a rushed reprint when newsagents started selling it at 1968 prices, not realising the retail value had gone skyrocketing from an earthbound 3/6 to a breathtakingly stratospheric 4/- !

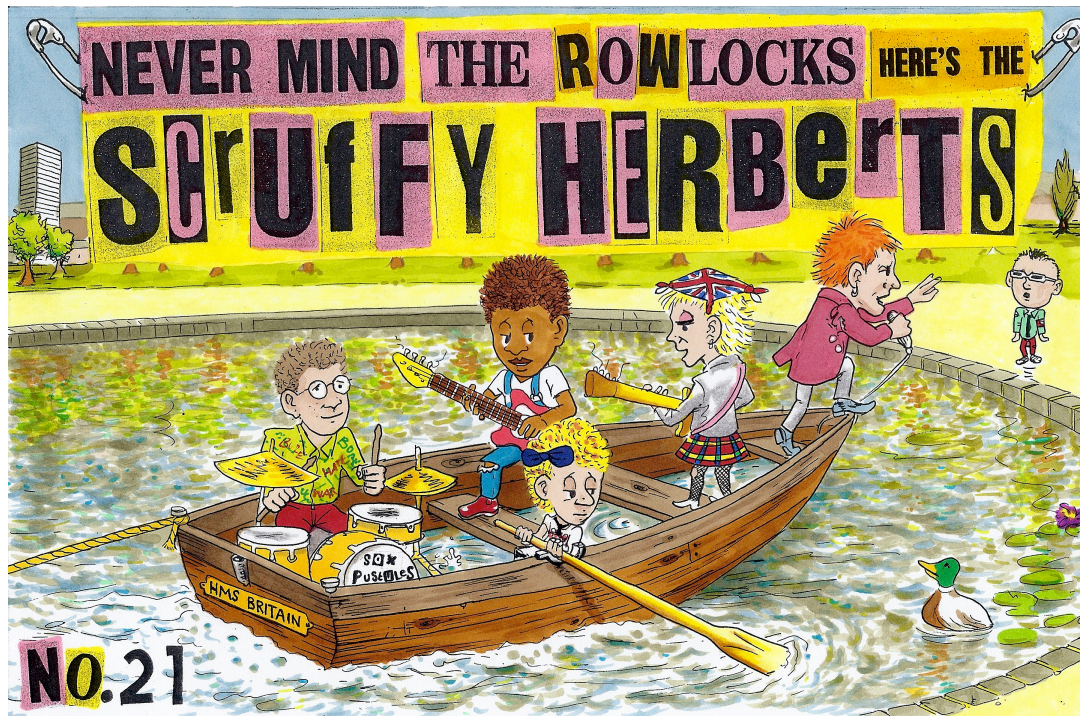




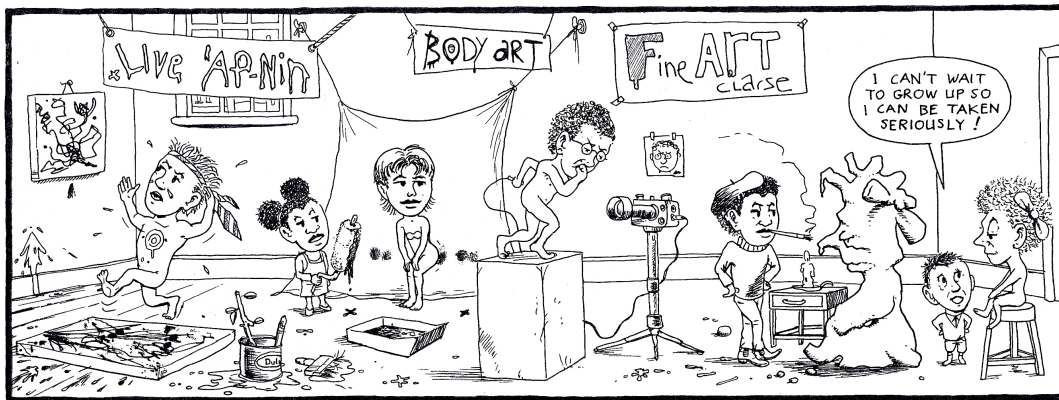


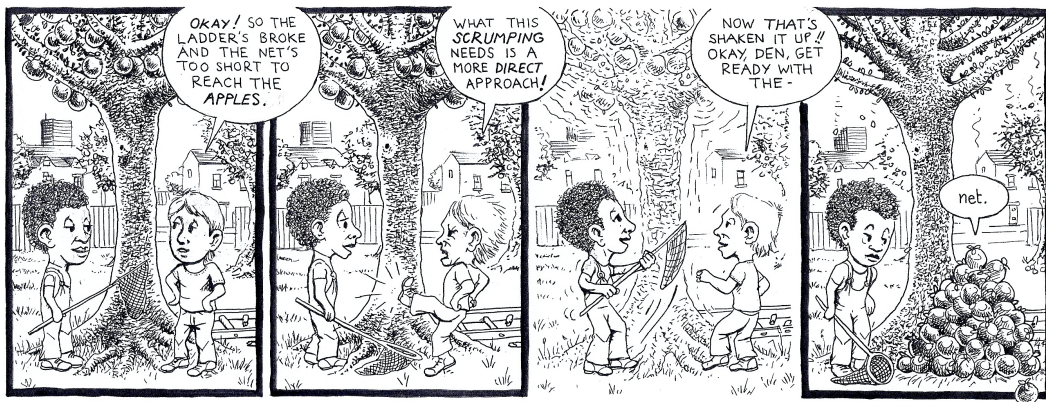
A popular diversion for children from the 1960s onwards were 'rub down dioramas', where an empty landscape image and a sheet of transfers printed onto clear acetate could be combined to fill many a rainy Sunday afternoon. The example opposite from 1973 was a hybrid effort, with Pat's figures to be rubbed down onto the panorama reproduced opposite taken from a background painting from the unfinished 'Scruffy Herberts' full-length animated film. The backers Barahoba Productions were a Van Nuys, California animation company jointly run by Bronx-born Barnaby Randall and English ex-pat Horace Barclay (hence the compound 'Ba-Ra-Ho-Ba' name). Barclay had moved to the States in the late 1960s and began his career managing pseudo-British Invasion pop combos like The Carnaby Treats and The Tortoises.

The sheet of transfers reproduced here was of necessity compiled from a number of sources as the initial print run of 5,000 sold very quickly and, unsurprisingly, unused complete sheets are rare.



When the Sex Pistols caused national outrage on television in 1976, they had been cribbing from the Herberts' textbook. The next year saw the children imitating the 'Punk Rock' group back, taking a Jubilee excursion across the duck pond to make a musical mark in their own leaking tub 'HMS Britain'.





The 1970s

The three-day-week, oil crises, power cuts, bomb scares, terrace hooliganism, Glam Rock, Disco, the 'decade that taste forgot' ... For all the disapproval and opprobrium heaped on a ten-year slice of British history, the Seventies have been enjoying a revival ever since they ended ! *The Scruffy Herberts* reflected the period in the backgrounds of strips where bovver-booted lads wearing different scarves could be glimpsed chasing each other down streets piled high with cartoon rubbish, while oiks in greatcoats moped past record shop windows. New characters like Stew Dent and Bella Bangles appeared, while 'Ted' from the 1950s emerged from 'Turkish Tone's Tonsorium' newly-shorn as Skin Ed.

As befits an era of such earth-shaking dynamism and drama, 1970 began with a bus ride !







THAT'S **WONDERFUL**, DEAR, BUT DO BE CAREFUL NOT TO STAND TOO CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF NOW.



YES, DEAR, BUT PLEASE DON'T GET OVER-EXCITED. STAY BALANCED, **BUNCHES**. DON'T—DON'T STEP BACK!



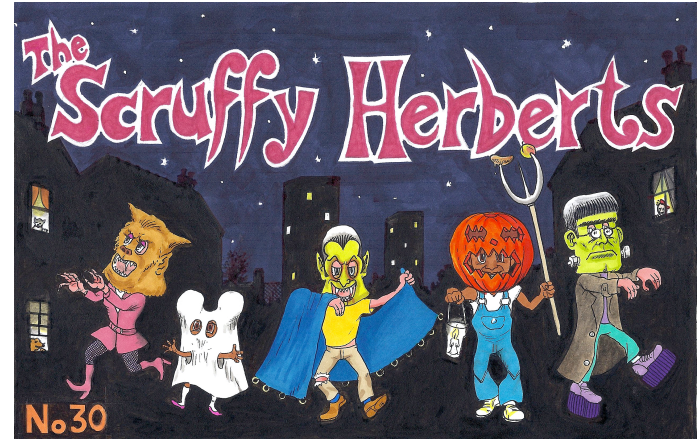
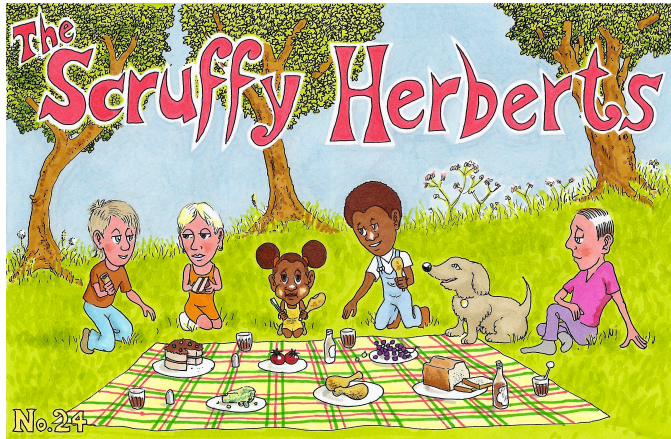
BUNCHES!

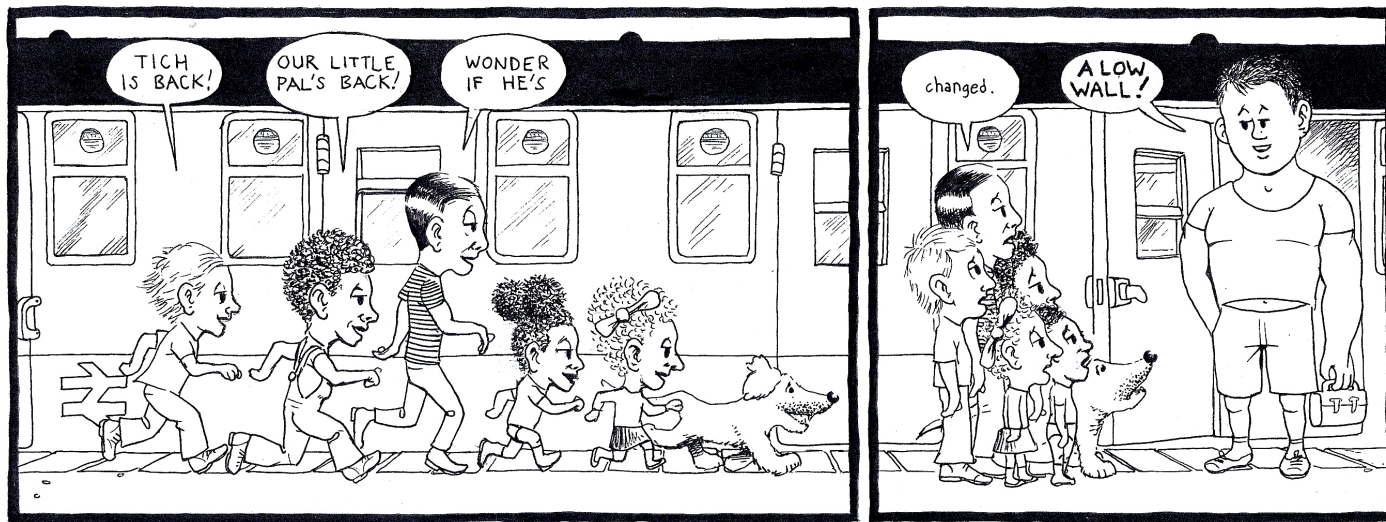


AGAIN!
AGAIN!

The 1980s

With childrens' Saturday cartoons achieving new heights of popularity at the turn of the decade, Don and I were invited to meetings at central London offices of TV production companies to discuss creating a *Scruffy Herberts* cartoon. Having experienced American animation companies in the 1970s, we were loath to get back on the treadmill, but eventually the promise of filthy lucre proved too much. Although it again came to nothing, a great deal of promotional gubbins was produced, and we did re-design and simplify the characters to capitalise on that never-to-be-seen mass market, which proved useful when transferred back to the newspaper strip. Below are the new-look 'cleaner' *Herberts* from the 1981 and 1986 annual collection covers.

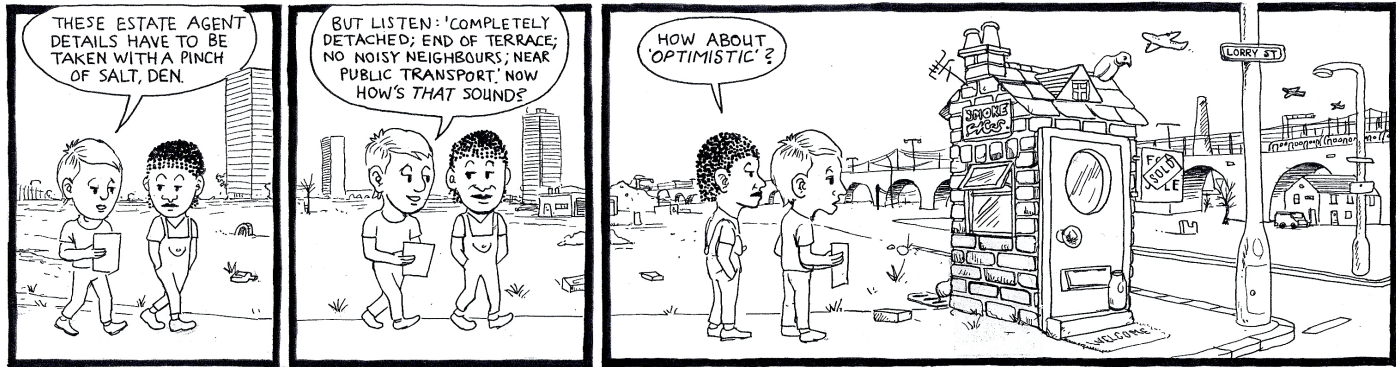




When Tich went away to 'short camp' in 1987, he returned after two weeks having undergone a noticeable regimen of self-improvement. However, his speech patterns remained unchanged. Known as 'anguish languish' to academics, he communicates phonetically, but in those linguistic adaptations sometimes a greater truth emerges.

The 1990s

Plus ça change, as they say in France. Except in the 1990s *change* was indeed *plus*-ed, as *The Scruffy Herberts* reverted to its original place on the comics page, sharing real-estate with *Social Sam* (another 50-year 'People's Face' veteran), sexy wife-swappers *Ron Coe & Kaye Tell*, perennial young-marrieds strip *The Capers*, American import *Rumpuss*, and time-travelling barbarian *Artor*. And that has been the situation ever since, with *The Scruffy Herberts* set to continue for as long as newspapers are published.



Cheers all,

Pat, somewhere on England's South Coast, Dec 1999