DC Thomson

Beano

Designer Biography

Dundee based DC Thomson publishers has defined the look and design of comics since the mid-1930’s with characters such as Dennis the Menace, Oor Wullie and the Broons.

Established as a family business by William Thomson in the 19th century, the main concern was the shipping industry. In 1886 the family took an interest in publishing and purchased the Dundee Courier.

In 1905 the Thomson firm merged with the other Dundee publishing house Lengs under the leadership of Thomson’s son David Couper.

Throughout the 20th century DC Thomson became one of the UK’s leading publishers, diversifying and moving into online content and broadcasting.

Design Example

The Beano was first published on 30th July 1938 by DC Thomson publishers and remains one of the most popular and best selling comic strips published with more than 3500 issues produced.

Introducing beloved characters such as Dennis the Menace, Gnasher, Minnie the Minx and the Bash Street Kids, the Beano thrived through the 1950’s and 60’s when comics were at the height of their popularity.

Over the decades the humour has changed and developed, but the comic has retained its anarchic style.

The Beano is now the longest running weekly comic.
**Process & Materials**

Artists Baxendale, Law and Reid created a sketchy style to enhance the strips anarhich style of humour. Their artwork was hand-drawn, after which it was hand-coloured by DC Thomson art department staff who would also glue on the speech bubbles.

David Law’s strips employed design elements of perspective, colour and sequence to create a tension between the rigid format of the page and the anarchy of the story.

The use of sound effects to shape the action and draw the eye of the reader through the composition is a particularly effective visual and narrative strategy.

David Sutherland has depicted the Bash Street Kids since the 1960’s and continues to hand draw the strips before they’re digitally scanned.

**Social & Cultural Influences**

The Beano and other DC Thomson comics broke from the traditional British comic format which usually featured images arranged in a grid with several lines of descriptive text underneath.

Based on new influences from American newspapers and comic strips, this ‘American style’ relied more on sequence, action, word balloons and visual humour rather than traditional text.

Unlike American comic’s though, the British comics adopted an anthology format, allowing many different genres to thrive.

In the late 1960’s, and into the 1970’s, the influence of Spanish, Italian and French comics became increasingly evident with the introduction photo-stories.

**Information for Inspiration**

**Scottish Design Galleries:**

- *The Book of Hours (The Playfair Hours)*, 1480-90 - Rouen, France
- *All-star Superman* graphic novel, Vol. 1, 2006-7 - Grant Morrison
- Artwork for ‘Dennis the Menace’ strip, for publication in *The Beano*, 1960 - David Law
- Five posters for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe - various years
- *The Face*, issue 59, 1985, Jamie Morgan

**Thinking Points**

- How have comics changed over the decades? What might you find in early Beano comics that might be unacceptable today?
- Is the printed comic still relevant in the 21st Century?
- How many different jobs do you think it takes to make up one comic strip?