WHERE HAVE ALL THE BOOTBOYS GONE?

Skinhead Style and Graphic Subcultures

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LCC Graphic Subcultures Research Group

Many late Twentieth Century subcultures have been exhaustively analysed and pored over by historians, academics and journalists; collected, collated and curated in books, magazines, galleries and museums. This level of recuperation has never been applied to the Skinhead movement – the subculture retains a strongly close-knit and largely underground identity, away from the cultural mainstream.

Looking at the historical and cultural origins of skinhead identity, the Graphic Subcultures Research Group at London College of Communication (LCC) presents a new exhibition running from Wednesday 23 October – Saturday 2 November 2013. From 1960s British roots to contemporary global interpretations of the subculture, the show focuses on the visual manifestations of skinhead style – in dress, illustration, graphic design, photography, media and publishing – together with its links to music genres, football, politics and class.

Key themes explored include:

- Origins: 1960s Mods and Skinheads
- 1960s Ska, Rocksteady and Bluebeat
- 1970s Suedeheads and Bootboys
- 1970s and 1980s Punk, Hardcore, Oi!, Skunx and Street Punk
- 2 Tone and the Ska Revival
- Class, Politics and Race – Neo Nazis, SHARP and RASH
- Gender and Sexuality
- Media Appropriation
- Contemporary Global Skinhead Identities

Exhibition Curator Toby Mott
Creative Director Russ Bestley
Catalogue Design Russ Bestley

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Boots image on cover taken from front cover of the Last Resort shop catalogue circa 1980. Design by Mick Furbank, photography Martin Dean. Images in catalogue from the Mott Collection and from the archive collection of Toast.

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Skinheads & Cherry Reds

They are the people you may see on the fringe of things, at free concerts shouting out for their favourite football team when everyone else wants to listen to the music, hanging around outside the Roundhouse trying to annoy people with long hair, or you may see them just hanging around on the street. They are the kids who have short cropped hair, wear boots and levis with braces. They don't really have a name as such, outsiders call them crop-heads, prickle heads, bullet-heads, spike-heads, thin-heads, bother boys, or agro boys.

The lack of a name is strange, for most groups of people with an image of their own eventually get a name, Mods, Rockers, Hippies, Heads. 'We are not mods really. Some people call us Mohair Men because we wear suits at the weekend, mohair men waiting for the agro. We're just sort of stylists really because we keep in with the styles.'

The thing they are known by is the gang and the area they come from. Like Mile-end, the Highbury, the Angel. The gang will have a hardcore of members with the rest of the bullet heads in that area supporting this gang against gangs from other areas. 'There's about 30 of us here from the Town (Summerstown), you know, King's Cross and all of them areas. If we ever got into trouble, the geezer's down there'd back us up; like there was 120 over the Hampstead Fair, geezer's we knew, and everyone would back us up if we was in trouble.'

Trouble is the key activity of the gangs. Known as a 'bit of agro' – a bit of aggravation. Trouble can start at some event such as a football match, a free concert 'like up at Parly Hill' or at just about any other time. At the

PETE SANDERS

54-46 That's My Number – The First Skinheads

Garry Bushell

"I want all you skinheads to get up on your feet, put your braces together and your boots on your feet, and give me some of that ollll' moonstompin' . . ."
Symarip 'Skinhead Moonstomp'

If you want to know what skinheads were about, it's best to ignore everything you have ever read about them in the UK press. The tabloid prejudice that skinheads were thick fascist thugs, and mugs heading for the jug was never true. Real skinheads were interested in reggae, fashion, football, fucking and fighting, although probably not in that order. The cult, which had its roots in Mod, went mainstream in 1969 - the year skinhead reggae ruled the charts. It was a genuine mass working-class phenomenon. Every city, every town in every part of the UK had a cropped contingent. Richard Allen's 1970 novel Skinhead, published later, sold more than a phenomenal 1 million copies in paperback, and spawned 17 further novels. The back-cover blurb sums it up as "a book that portrays with horrifying vividness all the terror and brutality that has become the trademark of these vicious teenage malcontents" – words certain to horrify the press and other self-appointed guardians of public morality, but for the nation's young tearaways they were an enticing advert.

Charlton Athletic hooligan Chris Weeks became a skin that year, when he was 14. Why? "Skinheads had it all," he says. "They had class, music, style. There's no way I could've been a 'grebo' – the greasers were filthy rotten back then and still are. They're nothing but a poor man's Hell's Angels. Give me half-inch braces and a clean Ben Sherman [shirt] any day." A 16-year-old skin interviewed at Margate in 1969 echoed that revulsion: "We hate the grease 'cos they don't wash and they wear all that leather and oily hair. They're just dirty and their girls are even worse. So when you meet them you just want to get in there and do them."

I interviewed Chris at length in my book Hoolies. He and his gang, the Middle Park Skins, came from a council estate in Eltham, South East London. They went to comprehensive schools when they weren't hopping the wag. And when they weren't fighting the rival Eltham Hounds skinhead gang they would frequent the White Swan pub at Crystal Palace for their Friday reggae night, with DJ Brian Jones, or take their own records to the Castlecombe youth club at nearby Mottingham. Though they loved Stax and Motown, reggae was the soundtrack of their lives. Like me, Chris would buy his ska imports from Music City in Lewisham, run by a Jamaican fella called Lee, who later deejayed at a club called Tites in Beckenham. Weeks and his mates would play the latest Jamaican sounds to get themselves hyped up for football.

Fighting was largely territorial and occurred mostly at or around football matches, although the mass media were more interested in the shock-horror mileage to be had from stories of skinhead attacks on minorities – homosexuals, squaddies, long-hairs (from my own childhood I can recall long-haired teens getting off the train at Eltham rather than Kidbrooke to avoid risking a beating from the Ferrier Estate skins) and Pakistanis, although these attacks were more to do with cultural than racial differences – a fine distinction to be made after you'd just been clobbered over the head with a half-brick to be sure, but an important one nonetheless. The new Pakistani immigrants were different: unlike the West Indian kids, they weren't cool, they didn't mix, and in fact they were equally (if not more) disliked by West Indian skinheads, or Afro Boys, as they became known.

The roots of Skinhead stretch back years before 1969. Its development can be traced directly to the 'suits', a Spartan branch of Mod first spotted on the London club scene around 1965 and very much a smart, working-class alternative to the dubious lure of psychedelia. West Indian culture exerted a major influence on the evolution of skinhead style. Ska, from which skinhead reggae sprouted, was a Jamaican development of American R&B embellished with jazz touches like the omnipresent horn section. Wailers' guitarist Ernest Ranglin said that the word 'ska' was cooked up to describe the 'Skat! Skat! Skat!' scratching guitar strum that goes behind. Ska was the music of the first-generation British blacks and the teenage immigrants who also adopted their own look and a name – the rude boys. The name was assumed by Jamaica's tough and volatile young ghetto hooligans who were noted for their savage gang wars and lawlessness. Ska records often aimed at persuading the rudies to cool it, but perversely the Wailers' first single, 'Simmer Down', and later songs like 'Rude Boy' and 'Jail House' only helped to glorify the cult.

The rude-boy rig-out sported by West Indian youths in south London was a direct ancestor of skinhead style: Crombie-type coats, trousers worn higher than the norm to emphasise white socks and black shoes, and all topped off with pork-pie hats and wraparound shades. Creole brought Desmond Dekker to the UK in 1967 to promote his Top Twenty hit '007 (Shanty Town)'. They gave him a suit; Dekker immediately insisted that the bottom six inches be cut off the trousers. For most of his new, young fans this would be their first exposure to rude-boy sartorial style. Razor hair partings also originated with the young blacks, and it's highly likely that the skinhead crop, although having roots in the Mod crew cut, was accentuated as a means of imitating the rude boys' hairstyle (although its similarity to the hairstyle of GIs and the glamorous, pioneering US astronauts can't be overlooked as contributory factors).

In the beginning these shaven-headed white kids were known by a variety of names (peanuts, cropheads, boiled eggs, no-heads and so on) but became identified as skinheads as early as 1967. In Jamie Mandelkau's Buttons: The Making of a President, he talks of battling 'the Walthamstow Skinheads' in late 1967. Of all the names, only 'skinhead' really did justice to the new cult's tough, aggressive and passionately working-class stance. East End skinhead Alan Mortlock recalls seeing his first skin gang in the spring of 1968. "It was at the fair at Wanstead Common. I was there with my mum and dad and saw all these guys with cropped hair. I remember Mum saying, 'What a lovely smart lot of boys' – and then they started rucking."

By the summer of 1968, the skinhead look had taken off as the working-class youth look, spawning a new media demon: the bootboy. Ian Walker claimed in New Society to have seen 4,000 skinheads running rampage at one soccer match. "They all wore bleached Levis, Dr Martens, a short scarf tied cravat style, cropped hair," he wrote, adding, "They looked like an army and after the game went into action like one."

A Rudie spin-off, the Afro Boys were plentiful in cities such as London and Birmingham, and were equals in skinhead gangs, initially at least; although the skinhead kids from the Collinwood gang, based in Stepney, interviewed in the Paint House, testify that sexual rivalry generated ill feeling. The original skinheads weren't renowned for political activity, but, if asked, the majority would have been Labour voters, like their parents. During the dustmen's strike of 1969, the Collinwood filled market barrows with rubbish and dumped it by the front door of Stepney town hall, shouting, "We're skinheads and we're doing this for the dustmen."

Class was a major factor in skinhead thinking. They hated bosses, the rich, and the middle class – middle- and upper-class hippies in particular. The Collinwood mob found them 'plain revolting… you notice that a lot of rich people turn hippy; they have been spoilt… they are reacting against society 'cause their own people are society. Hippies are just lazy no-good dropouts… they look down on us…' The skins of the Chelsea Shed reacted to the student uprisings of 1968 with a chant of "Students, students – ha, ha, ha."

Escalating violence at football matches – which neither began nor ended with skinheads – resulted in the adoption of various weapons or 'tools', possibly the nastiest being homemade kung fu metal filed into star shapes to be chucked like darts (which were also popular) at your opponents. Millwall fans came up with the 'Millwall brick', a cosh made from a simple tabloid newspaper folded until it became lethally hard. Hooligans also fashioned makeshift knuckledusters out of coins wrapped in paper. The most popular 'helpers' however, were the simple metal comb and steel-capped Dr Martens work boots. It's unlikely that the good 19th-century Bavarian Dr Klaus Martens had the slightest idea of just how seminal his patented Air-Wair soles (resistant to fat, acid, oil, petrol and alkali, and topped off with handsome leather uppers) were to become for generations of British hooligans. Martens, or DMs, were an essential ingredient of the early skinhead look. Then they were usually brown or cherry red, and just eight-hole affairs as a rule. Girls never wore DMs: they favoured monkey boots.

The very best guide to the evolution of skinhead sartorial style over the golden age of 1968 to 1971 was written by Jim Ferguson and published in Nick Knight's Skinhead book (although his essay and Harry Hawke's handsome reggae discography are the only things worth buying the book for, as the rest consists of over-generalised, under-researched, pseudo-sociological claptrap about the late-70s skinhead resurgence). Simplifying, early workday/football wear would be boots, braces (to emphasis working-class origins and loyalties), any unfashionable shirt, an army or RAF great coat, a Levi's or Wrangler jacket, or a donkey jacket. For best, dances and suchlike, all skins aspired to possess a decent suit, preferably a mohair, 2-Tone or Prince of Wales check affair, worn with brogues, and later loafers. The all-time favourite skinhead coat was a sheepskin – 'Crombies didn't really catch on until suede-head time.

Hair was razor-cropped, but heads were never shaved bald. The razors were set to different lengths, one to five, with the number-one crop being the shortest. The favourite shirt was the Ben Sherman with button-down collar and back pleats. Bens were usually checked (never white) and worn with the top button undone and the sleeves turned up once. Brutus check shirts and later the humble Fred Perry were also acceptable. Smarter skins replaced Levi's red-tag jeans with Sta-Prest trousers. Andrew McClelland, a former skinhead from Woolwich, southeast London, says, "Everything had a name. When you went out at night you went in your Ben Sherman shirt, your Levis, your Doctor Martens or your Squires. Even when we went down to Margate you could always tell our chaps. We all looked the same, like a uniform, in sheepskins, white jeans and boots."

For Chris Weeks and his mates, getting the right look was essential but hard for working-class kids on low incomes. He says, "I couldn't afford a proper Ben Sherman, so my first shirt was a Brutus. They looked just as good and 39 shillings and 6d [£1.98] you couldn't go wrong. I got that shirt at Harry Fenton's in Eltham High Street. After I left school I got a job at Burton's in Bexleyheath and so finally I could afford my first handmade mohair suit and proper Bens. The manager didn't mind me crop because he said it reminded him of his days in the RAF. I got my first Crombie overcoat in Burton's, because I got staff discount. I got my two pairs of Sta-Prest strides in Millets, one white and one a dark green pair. My Levi jeans cost 59 shillings and 6d [£2.98]. They had half-inch turn-ups. Levi's ruled in London, but in the Midlands Wranglers were more popular. I had half-inch braces, one blue pair and one red pair, at 12 bob [60p] each. My DMs were Burgundy with yellow stitching and had to be polished with Kiwi brown polish. Also in my wardrobe was me Squires jacket, made by Harrington, my black Royals [brogues], my black Gibson lace-up basket weave tops, and my cappers with screw-on thick rubber soles – a lot like the boots I had a few years later in the Guards… To complete the look I had to have a Trilby titfer [hat] when I nicked out of Selfridges up London. I was with a girlfriend from Chislehurst and I just walked in, tried it on and walked out wearing it."

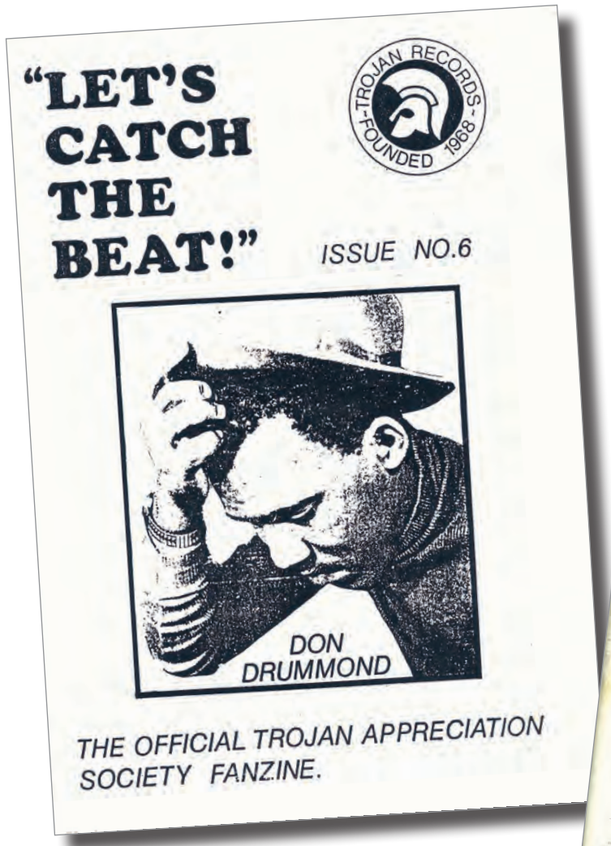
Older skins with more ready cash pushed the smartness with a mod's attention to detail. Tonic mohair suits were the ultimate in style. They were worn with handkerchiefs in the top pocket. Suit jackets would be single-breasted with as many as five buttons, large (four-inch) pocket flaps with ticket pockets inside. Black and white skins mixed freely at dancehalls such as the Streatham Locarno and the Croydon Suite. Reggae was the skinhead music, but it was a markedly different reggae from the simple ska that the rudies had introduced mods to earlier on in the decade. Around 1966, ska in Jamaica had developed into rock steady, which was faster and funkier than the original, in much the same way as US R&B had developed into soul. Alton Ellis's definitive dance hit 'Rock Steady' was typical of the new genre, which itself developed. Until by 1969 it was producing massive British chart hits like Desmond Dekker's 'Israelites'. This 'reggae of the '69 kind' was a major chart factor for the following few years with some Jamaican artists quite shamelessly pandering to their British audience (the best example of overtly skinhead-orientated reggae was Symarip's 'Skinhead Moonstop'). Trojan Records released budget-price compilations like the Tighten Up and Reggae Chartbusters series, which sold for 14s 6d (72 ½p) and sold in excess of 60,000 units a pop.

In the earlier part of the decade a bluebeat aficionado would have to go to Brixton (where Somerleyton Road was then the 'front line') and clubs like the Ram Jam to hear the music, or southeast London pubs like the Three Tuns. We would trek miles for the latest imports. But, as the music moved into pop's mainstream, so reggae nights became regular features of dance halls like the local Palais. Contemporary reggae promoter Tony Cousins recalls, "The great thing about this kind of music was that the audiences were completely integrated between black and white." US soul was still extremely popular too, and artists like Booker T had a large skinhead following, although inevitably the music lived more through DJs in the pubs and clubs than on stage.

The Middle Park Mob were from an all-white council estate, but the skins were mates with Jamaican lads from Brixton who also congregated at the White Swan in Crystal Palace. Chris Weeks recalls one black kid called Tony who would delight the regulars with his impression of Arthur Conley singing 'Sweet Soul Music'. The happy harmony ended only when a big Jamaican DJ called Neville tried to take the venue over, bringing his own massive PA to drown out Brian Jones's sounds. Says Chris, "The bloke was massive and Brian was shitting himself. But as far as we were concerned he was ruining our night and he had to go. So we all got stuck in. The police came and lobbed us out. Sadly, that was the end of the White Swan reggae night."

No youth cult stands still, however. The skinhead look became progressively smarter, with boots and braces dropped in favour of belts and loafers even during the day, evolving into the suede-head style. Suede-heads wore their hair longer – it was combable – and favoured the Crombie coat, preferably with a velvet collar. Some suedes developed a 'city gent' look sporting bowlers and brollies, although the classic suede image was the Harrington jacket – named after Rodney Harrington who wore it in the TV show Peyton Place (like the city gent look, it was originally briefly fashionable with mods) – Sta-Prest trousers (white ones looked best) and ox-blood Royals. Barrie Taylor (a.k.a. Barrie the mod) from east London recalls, "By the end of '71, suede-head had developed into the 'smoothie' look with the hair even longer, Fair Isle yoke pullovers, polo necks and later tank tops, and shirts with hideous rounded collars. The favoured smoothie shoes were called Norwegians. They were lace-ups and had a basket weave design on the front." With the explosion of glam and glitter between 1971 and 1973, skinhead was finished as a mass movement…until the late 70s, when it all came-back, first with punk and then 2-Tone…

Garry Bushell
Columnist & Author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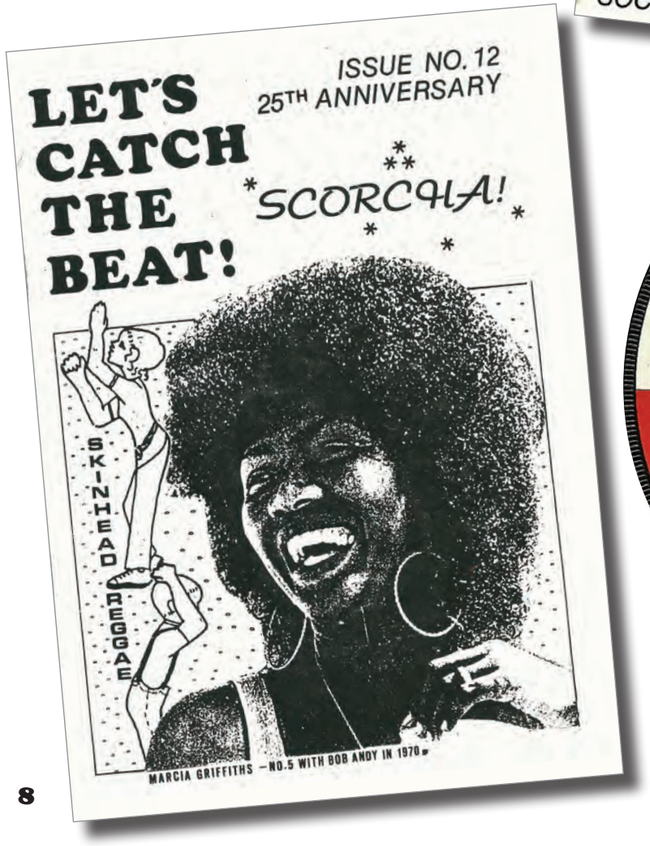
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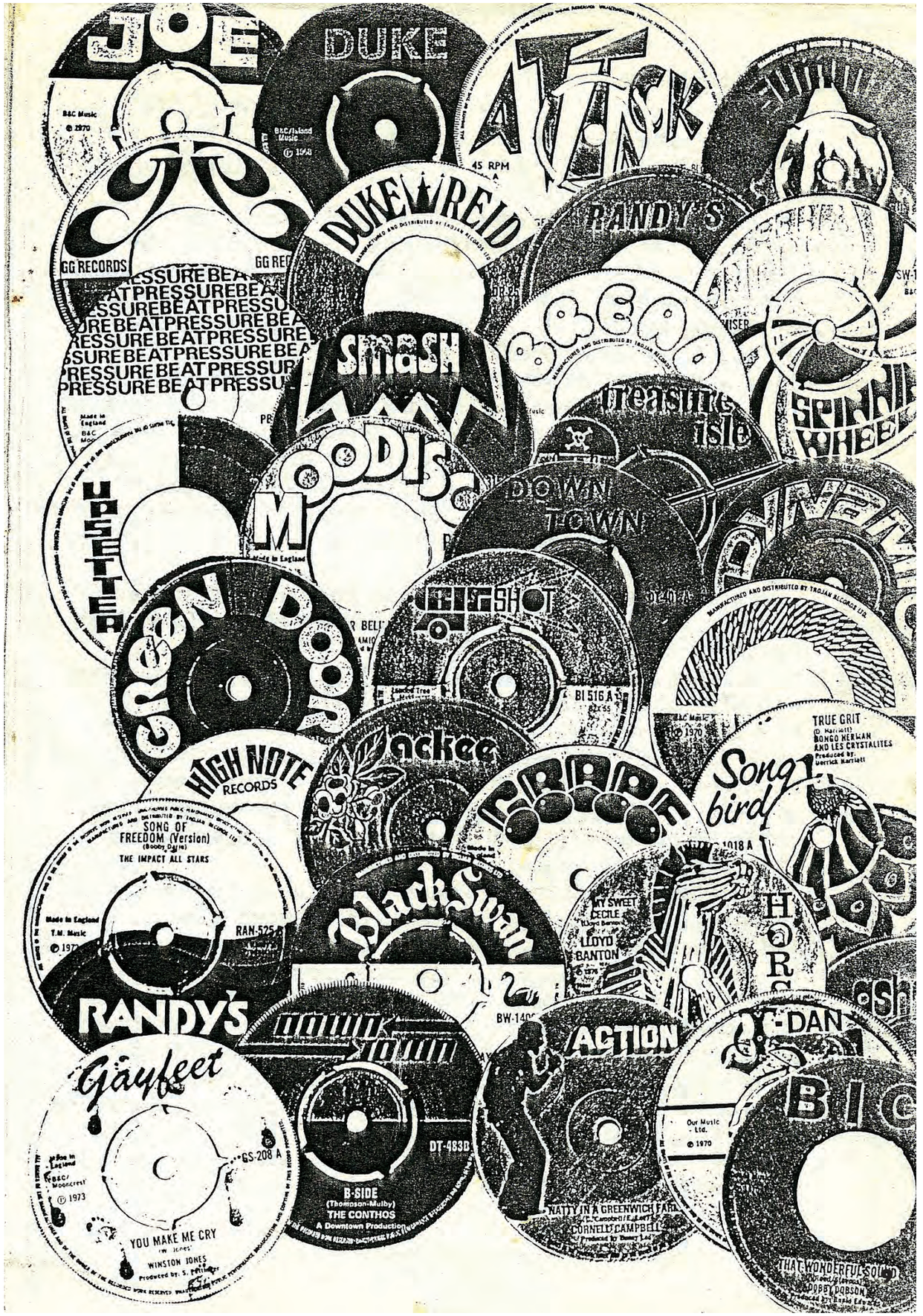
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THAT WONDERFUL SOUND
BOBBY DOBSON

Flashbacks of a Bootboy

Tom Vague

Before punk I was a bootboy/soulboy/glam rocker, more interested in football than music. I became an Everton supporter in 1968, when my mum said I had to choose one of the teams in the cup final and I went for the blues who duly lost to West Brom. At school in Gillingham, Dorset, the local teams to support were Bournemouth and/or Portsmouth. One of my first brushes with the law came over 'Pompey Bootboys Rule' or possibly 'Rool' graffiti on the scout hut in Mere where I lived. Gillingham and Shaftesbury, where I was born, were bootboy towns and Tisbury was the greaser stronghold, which we formed an alliance with the Shaftesbury lot to attack.

The mid-70s bootboy look was brown Dr Martens boots, Oxford or Birmingham bags trousers, jean jacket, football scarf, and post-suedehead quite long hair, not much shorter than the greasers. My most style conscious mate Steve Luftman had a Crombie coat with a red handkerchief in the breast pocket. We were mostly engaged in fairly harmless rural vandalism. I once somehow got the better of Luke, the leader of the Tisbury bikers, in a village hall disco fight/drunken tussle. I was fully committed to post-mod/skinhead pop culture, but one of my best mates, Derek Skinner, was a greaser, known as Skin. He was into the Velvet Underground and the New York Dolls, and I first saw Sniffin' Glue fanzine after he got a copy at a John Cale and the Boys gig at Bournemouth Winter Gardens.

In 76/77 I was still going to football, and playing, more than going to gigs. I would go to Man United games against Southampton and Bristol City with United supporter mates in 'the Red Army' football hooligan days, and even went to the 76 Charity Shield with the Liverpool supporting leader of the Gillingham bootboys Dougie Charlton. Punk gigs at Bournemouth Village Bowl or Winter Gardens – the Clash, Damned, Jam, Generation X, Slaughter and the Dogs, Sham 69 – were like football hooliganism indoors with music and girls. In 78 I went to Chelsea v Everton after going to Seditionaries, and the Rock Against Racism Carnival in Hackney, in Sham army mode: black Dr Martens boots, combat trousers and black Harrington jacket.

At the 78 Reading festival I was pictured in the local paper at the front when Sham came on, bearing some resemblance to Jimmy Pursey. As we got there I remember a big scary West Ham NF skinhead hitting anybody who tried to walk past him, but I got by unscathed as he either considered me a fellow skin or was busy hitting someone else. After Sham I saw the aftermath of the mini-riot in the beer tent and ended up with a skinhead girl called Julie during the more harmonious 'If the Kids are United' Pirates' set. We later had some aggro off a group of Status Quo fans but managed to talk our way out if it, saying "We're not skinheads, we're punk rockers", accusing them of acting the same as the neo-Nazi skins.

Shortly after Reading I saw Adam and the Ants for the first time, during an anti-punk bikers' mini-riot in Salisbury, and went post-punk. In 79 a lot of my punk mates became ska revival Two-tone skinheads, which I thought was a cop out, but we featured the Specials, Madness and Selecter in Vague, along with the Ants, Joy Division and Public Image. The Ants at High Wycombe Town Hall in 80 started off as another anti-punk mini-riot initiated by the local skins sieg heiling and throwing chairs, but ended as a skinhead rout, as they had underestimated the turn out of London punks, actively encouraged by Adam.

There was a faction of the Bournemouth punks that became skins but still wore Seditionaries/punk T-shirts, who I remained in with. One of them appeared when I was getting on the guest list for a Siouxsie and the Banshees gig at Poole and I got him in as my plus one. We then had a disagreement with the Banshees' new merchandiser, who proceeded to grab a bag of Vague 10. Whereupon the merchandising stall was surrounded by skinheads and the tour manager had to beg me to call them off. Once the Vagues were retrieved the skins reluctantly complied but told me they were going to do over the Banshees' van. On the previous Banshees tour we alerted the band to some sieg heiling skins in the audience at Derby, prompting them to change into Star of David 'Israel' T-shirts which quelled the trouble.

In Ladbroke Grove in the early 80s, in the KPH pub on the way to a post-punk gig at Acklam Hall/Bay 63, we were befriended by one of the infamous Grove skins. He accompanied us to the Golden Cross on Portobello, where he seemed to be on good terms with all the local dealers, but then refused to help us bump start a black bloke's car under the Westway. I was relieved that my post-punk skinhead mate Gary, who was associated with Death in June, did help. Gary and Dev, who was Asian, from my squat virtually became NF skins after listening to too much Joy Division and Throbbing Gristle. The Ladbroke Grove skins were widely considered to be NF, as in the skinhead riot scene in Breaking Glass under the Westway, in which they appear re-enacting the skin mini-riots at Acklam Hall. But the Wise brothers portray them as, if not left-wing red skins, non-racists who socialised with the Rastas on All Saints Road.

Tom Vague
Writer and editor of Vague fanzine


S.H.A.R.P.
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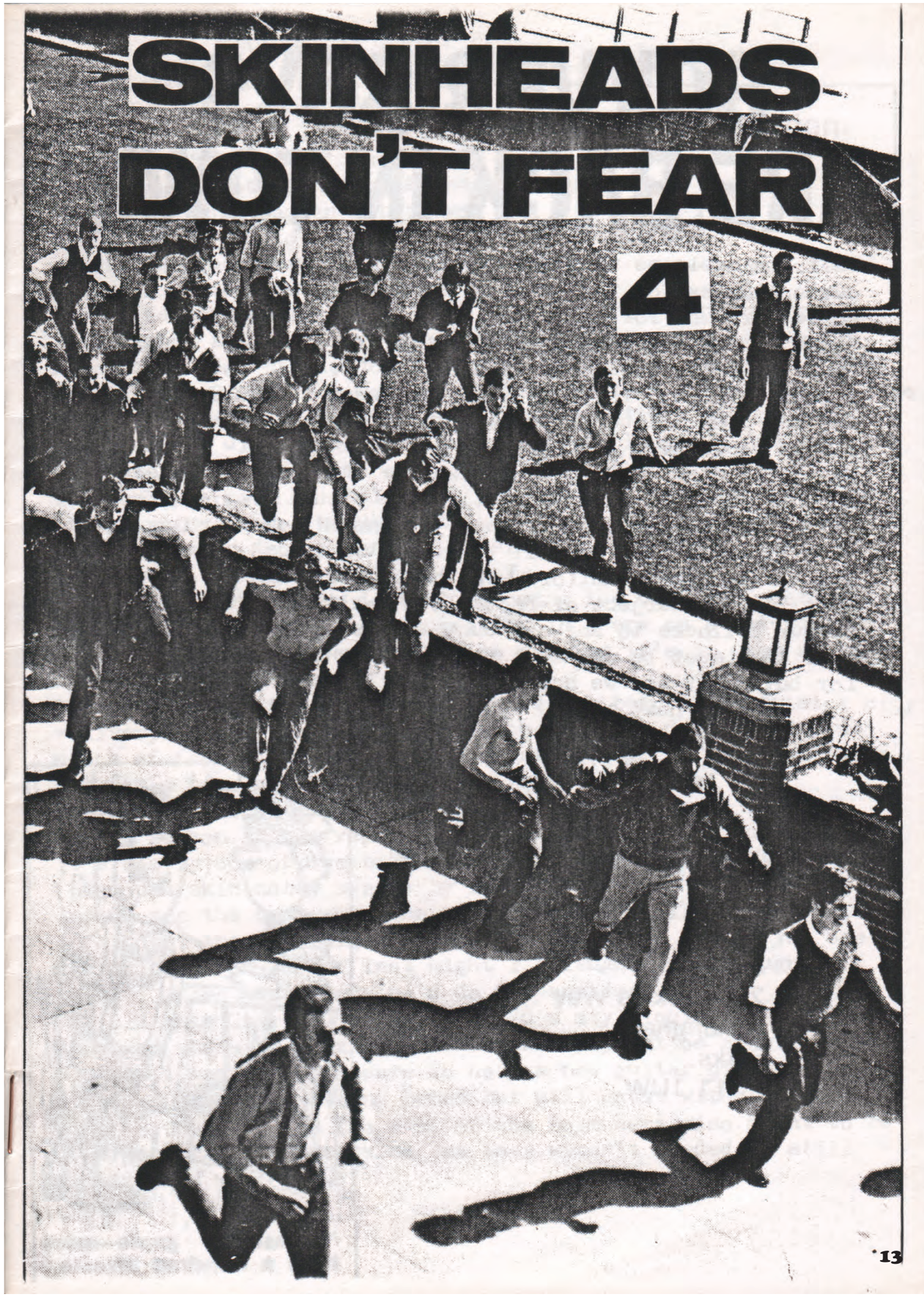
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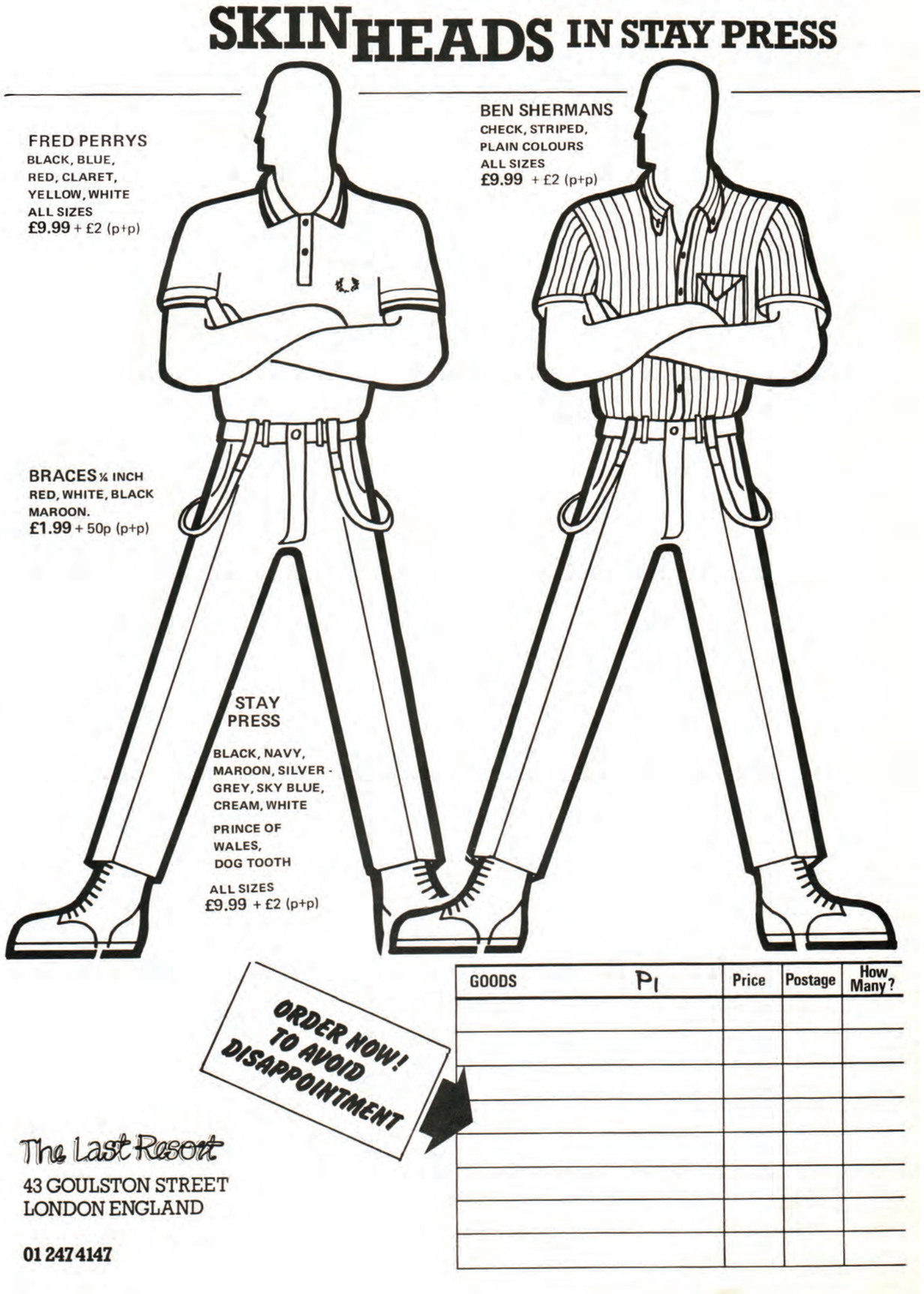

The Finer Detail

Shaun Cole

'The skinhead style is smart, clean and tough. It is a precise uniform which proclaims identity'

Nick Knight's book, Skinhead, from which this quote is taken, was not the first detailed piece of writing about skinhead culture, however, it did make a concerted effort to present a comprehensive picture of this much discussed and sometimes misunderstood or misrepresented subculture. Like Knight, chroniclers and observers of Skinhead style and culture, including sociologists John Clarke, Tony Jefferson, Phil Cohen, Ted Polhemus and Dick Hebdige, photographers Gavin Watson and John G. Byrne and participant skinhead George Marshall, have all noted the clean-cut precision and attention to detail of the various stages of the development of this subculture from its emergence in the late 1960s to its post-punk revival in the late 1970s and beyond.

Although Dick Hebdige used the expression 'lower-class dandy obsessed with the small details of dress' (1979: 52) to describe Mods, as a distinctive subculture that had grown out of the diversification of styles of mod dressing in the latter part of the 1960s, the skinheads inherited this keen eye for detail. The boots, braces, jeans or Sta-prest trousers, button down shirts and close-cropped hair worn by the 'hard mods' and the first wave of skinheads from 1968 was a uniform that Phil Cohen described as 'a kind of caricature of a model worker' (1997: 91); where functionality and adherence to a practical proletariat ethic determined the choice of garments.

Narrow cut, tailored tonic or mohair suits indicated both an adherence to notions of smartness and a working class aspiration that had been seen in mods and teddy boys. In his 'skinhead bible' Spirit of '69, George Marshall echoed Cohen's words, proclaiming that the skinhead's choice of clothing reflected 'hardness, masculinity and working-classness' (Marshall 1991; 35).

Over the forty-five years of the subculture's existence there have been divisions, between original and post-punk revival, racist and non- or anti racist, straight and gay, male and female (even though the focus here is on male skinhead style). But throughout all of these variations and divisions, through the fashionable appropriations and the revivals and assertions of authenticity, adherence to particulars and detail in clothing and style has been key. Jim Fergusson's 'fashion notebook' in Knight's book clearly illustrates these particularities in early skinhead style, for example in 1968 trouser legs were eighteen inches wide with half inch turn ups worn to skim the top of a pair of eight hole boots and lapels on suit jackets were three inches at the widest.

In the clothing glossary section of Spirit of '69, Marshall notes that Ben Sherman and other button down collar shirts should be worn with the top button undone, whilst Fred Perry polo shirts should always be worn with the top button done up. Other oral sources indicate that the size of the button down shirt collar was also important: revivalist skinheads looked to buy shirts where three fingers could be inserted between the fold of the collar and the button. Braces needed to be no more than half and inch wide and although initially worn to hold up jeans or trousers, following the late seventies revival could be worn hanging down over the bottom.

These examples are by no means the full extent of the prescriptive detail required in skinhead dress, but they do offer an insight into the precision of attention to detail that is a key component of any skinhead's style.

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Shaun Cole
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Song From the Streets

Matt Worley

Oi! was not so much created as discovered. The term was adopted by the Sounds writer Garry Bushell in 1980 to describe a new wave of punk bands for whom 'punk ain't dogma or religion but the fulfillment of a burning need for rock 'n' roll in its purest form, raw, aggressive and threatening.' Taken from a Cockney Rejects song, Oi! was first used as the title for a compilation album designed to reassert punk as a form of 'working-class protest'. More broadly, it served as a catch-all term for what Bushell described as 'a loose alliance of volatile young talents, skins, punks, tearaways, hooligans, rebels with or without causes united by their class, their spirit, their honesty and their love of furious rock 'n' roll'.

To the forefront, initially at least, were bands and poets such as the 4-Skins, Blitz, The Business, The Exploited, Infa Riot, Garry Johnson and the Last Resort. For Bushell, they revived punk's original promise in providing 'music made by and for the hundreds of thousands of human hand grenades primed by this middle-class and middle-aged controlled society which has guaranteed them NO FUTURE and left them to fester in their frustration'.

The parameters of Oi! were outlined in various Sounds articles and a series of six compilation LPs released between 1980 and 1984. The first and most important article was 'The New Breed', which complemented the release of Oi! The Album in November 1980 and sought to define what Bushell distinguished as a particular strand of punk rock born of the Sex Pistols and The Clash but filtered through the blunt social realism of Cock Sparrer and Sham 69.

Two more immediate precedents were the Cockney Rejects and the Angelic Upstarts, the first of whom came from London's Custom House and helped forge the nucleus of a scene in and around the Bridge House pub in Canning Town. While the Rejects produced a kind of 'ruck 'n' roll' that soon found favour with members of West Ham's Inter City Firm (ICF), the Angelic Upstarts offered a more politicised street punk inspired by The Clash but firmly rooted in the working-class culture of their native north-east. Where the Rejects sung of 'fighting in the streets' and eschewed politics in all its forms, so the Upstarts' set concentrated its fury on 'police oppression' and included paeans to mine workers. For the Upstarts' lead singer, Mensi, punk was 'working-class rebellion, a way of making kids think a bit more'. For Jeff 'Stinky' Turner, the Rejects' lead singer, punk was 'bootboy music. Harringtons, boots and straights, that's what we're all about'.

As this suggests, Oi! comprised what Bushell described as a 'skin/bootboy/hardcore-punk mentality'. It was based on principles of pride, loyalty and courage. It was 'anti-politics', in that it rejected both mainstream politics and the 'crackpots' of the political fringe. Instead, Oi! sought to provide a street-level protest against the 'smug politicians and greedy bosses [who] have destroyed whole communities and thrown an entire generation on the scrapheap'.

Of course more organised politics did intrude. The far right sought to claim Oi! and the far left proved quick to denigrate it, especially after the infamous Hambrough Tavern gig of July 1981. But both failed to succeed. If the politics of left and right impinged on Oi!, then the common denominator of the bands involved remained a class identity that defined their understanding of punk and affirmed their sense of place within the shifting contours of British society.

Oi!, then, was more than just a voice from the dead end of the street. It was also more than just a soundtrack for skinheads. Today, as it forms the basis of scenes across every continent, so simplistic racial connotations fall away and the politics of class once more come to the fore. Oi!, as Garry Johnson always made clear, was about 'having a laugh and having a say'; it was about being 'sharp in brain and dress', 'knowing no-one is better than you', 'not giving a toss about the boss', being 'proud to be British, but not xenophobic'. Most importantly, Oi! was steadfastly and unapologetically 'proud to be working class'.

Matt Worley
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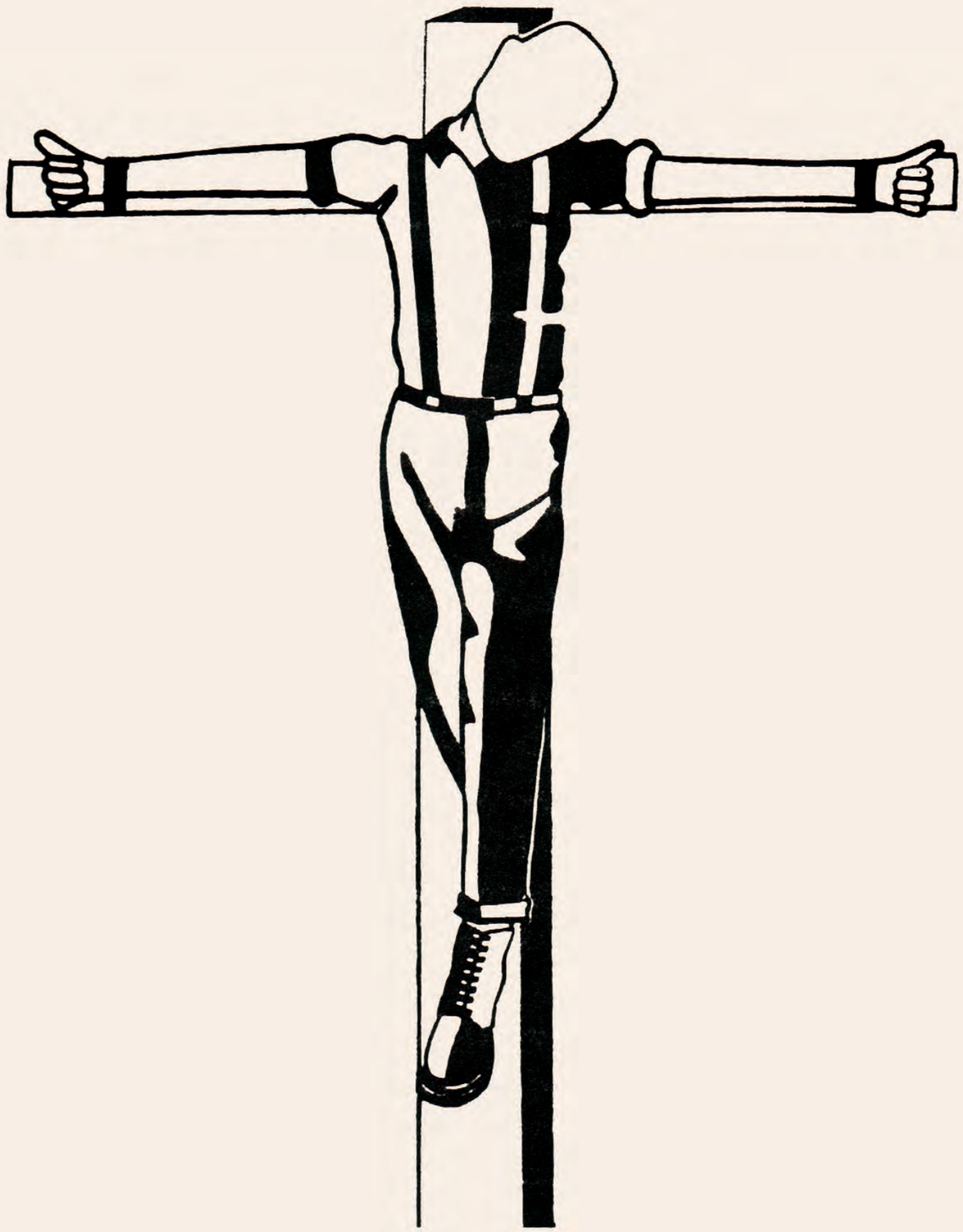

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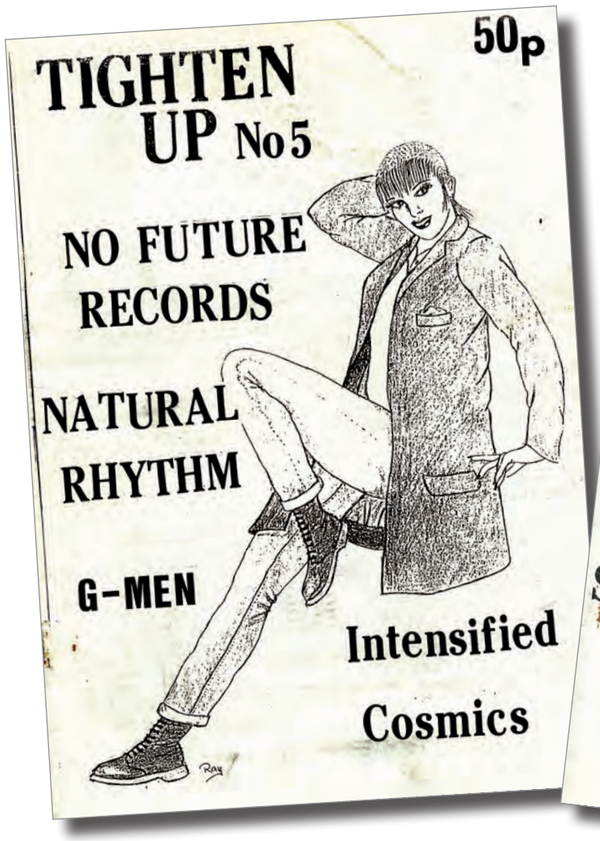

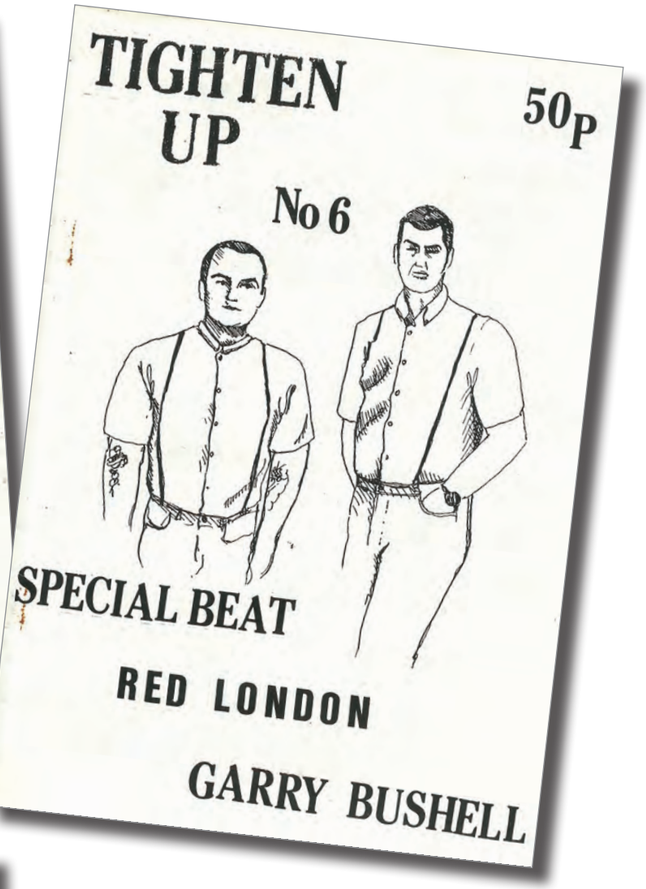

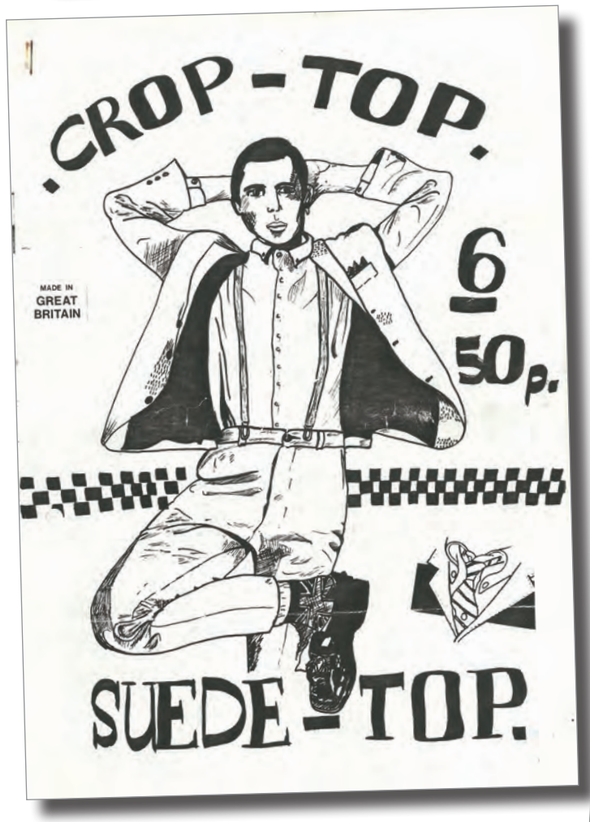

Boots, Braces and Blackletter: Skinhead Graphics

Russ Bestley

Skinhead identity, in all its many variations and interpretations, centres on a range of visual and stylistic codes, many linked directly to clothing and dress as well as hairstyle. Graphic material associated with the subculture – such things as fanzines, flyers, posters, catalogues, book jackets and record sleeves – follows similar codes and conventions, usually communicating an affiliation to subcultural identity through the use of drawings or photographs of skinheads themselves, along with bold headings and simple icons or symbols associated with the scene including items of clothing, records and flags. The word 'skinhead' itself features heavily.

The most common and frequently used 'visual tropes' are images of skinheads themselves – in action (running, fighting, performing on stage or in the audience watching bands) or in portrait pose, often looking directly at the viewer. This applies to both photographs and drawings – with the latter sometimes adopting a more exaggeratedly aggressive posture or extreme visual perspective. Symbols often centre on the boot (usually Dr Martens or combat boots), commonly in extreme close-up and tightly cropped, or on braces, Ben Sherman or Fred Perry shirts, narrow legged and turned up jeans, or on tattoos, faces and fists.

The means of production nearly always utilises either photography or line drawing, both of which are more immediately accessible to untrained image-makers and lend themselves well to simple methods of reproduction such as photocopying. The skinhead scene benefits and suffers equally from a lack of commercial or cultural recuperation, and consequently far fewer examples of slick, professional graphics exist when compared to other subcultures that were seen as offering better opportunities for commercial exploitation (such as the later hippy movement, punk and new wave, goth, emo, new romantic or hip hop).

Skinhead graphics tend to be overtly hard-hitting and direct – the use of high contrast black and white photography and line art is mirrored by bold typographic treatments and the adoption of strongly upright and condensed sans serif or heavy uppercase gothic typefaces. As with with punk fanzines, Letraset dry transfer lettering is commonplace within later skinhead fanzines, with access to a wide range of suitable or appropriate typefaces limited and thus generally standardised through convention rather than design. Right wing elements tend to stray from the formula to incorporate an abundance of blackletter styles, an ancient European style used to describe type where the darkness of the characters overpowers the whiteness of the page.

The survival of blackletter type styles in Germany through to the early 20th Century, a fact often attributed to the endurance of the Protestant religion in the country, led to its common association with Nazism, particularly in its schwabacher and fraktur forms. However, this is a common misconception, as the Nazi party adopted a range of stiffer and more upright adaptations, redesigned by German type designers in an attempt to update the form and remove its more calligraphic elements. While the official interpretation of these new typefaces suggested that they "… stand strong and uniform, clear and powerful, a convincing expression of a new German determination", they were often decried by typesetters as schaftstiefelgrotesk or 'jackboot grotesques'.

Such typographic subtleties are generally lost on the producers of right wing skinhead graphics, who tend to utilise any available typeface that on first appearance resembles the generic blackletter form, along with symbols directly appropriated from Nordic or Celtic tradition (the celtic cross and rune symbols are commonplace) and 'hidden' Nazi references including cryptic numerical codes (18 relating to the first and eighth letter of the alphabet, AH, the initials of Adolph Hitler, and 88 relating to HH, or Heil Hitler).

One of the most common skinhead symbols, the 'crucified skinhead' illustration, was originally drawn by Mick Furbank for the Last Resort skinhead shop in Petticoat Lane, London. Often interpreted as a symbol of skinhead identity with an accompanying association with persecution for membership of the scene, the image has been appropriated by both left and right wing factions of the subculture and is widely adopted as a tattoo by skinheads internationally. Such easily replicable symbols comprise a graphic language that is accessible and transferable throughout the skinhead subculture.

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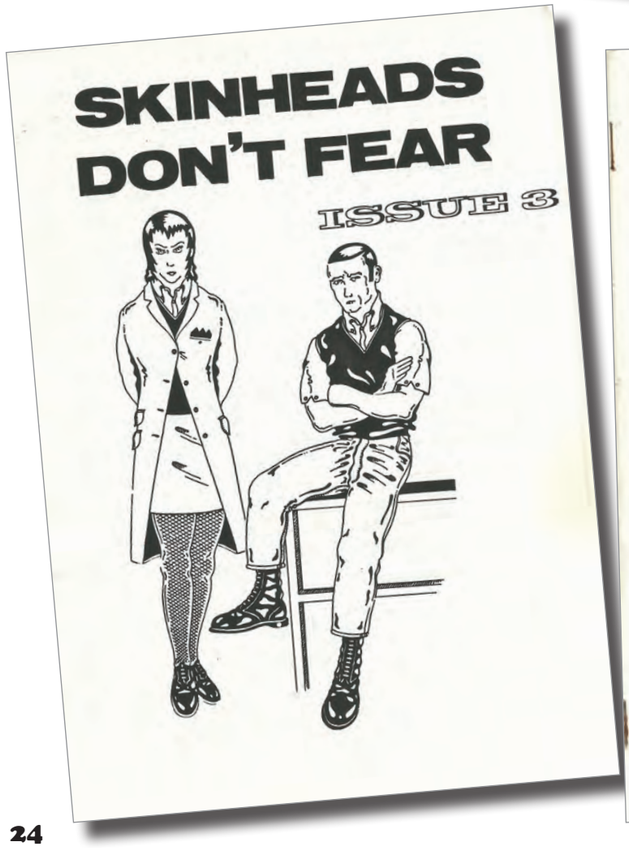
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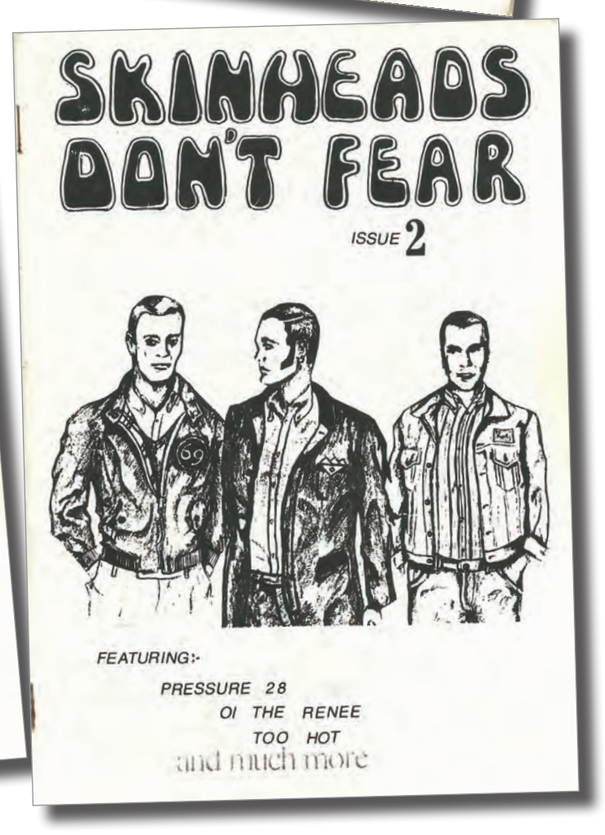
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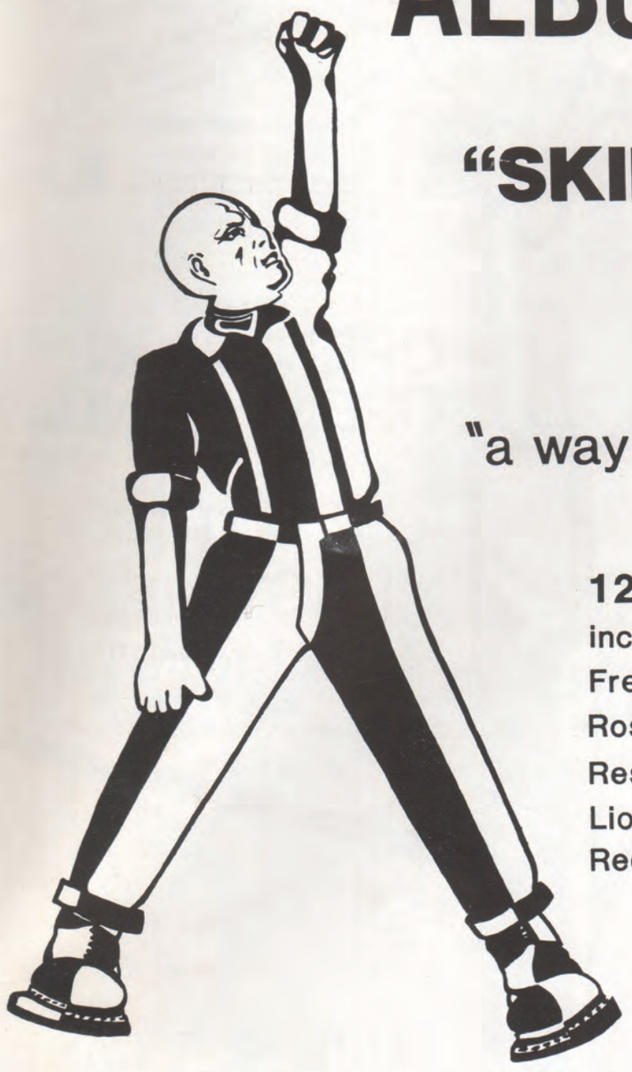

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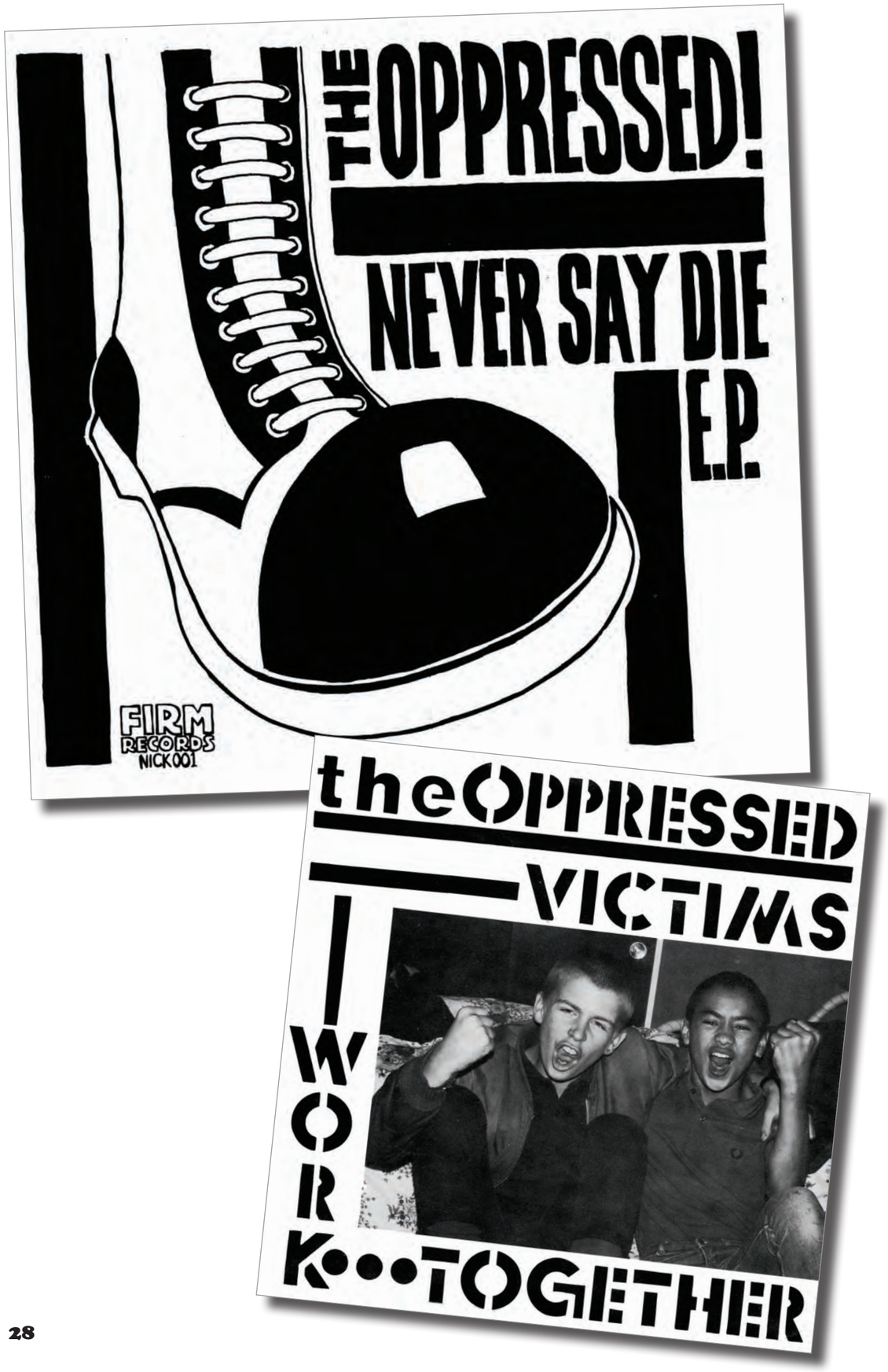

Rebels With a Cause

Ana Raposo

While the original skinhead subculture emerged in the 1960s, the burgeoning of the punk movement also accompanied a skinhead revival. Many revival skinheads turned to punk music and the two subcultures have been intertwined ever since. There are many instances of individuals shifting between punk and skinhead subcultures, or even keeping a foot in both camps.

The skinhead revival of the late 1970s resulted in a new breed of skinhead. According to George Marshall:

"During the summer of 1977, when battles between teds and punks were a regular weekend tourist attraction along the King's Road, the original skinheads who believed in the old ways, often fought alongside the teds, while the new breed sided with the punks." (Marshall 1994: 72)

This new breed of skinheads turned to Oi!, a punk variation trying to reconnect to working class culture. Presenting faster and more aggressive sounds, it reflected its roots in pub rock, reviving the sing-a-long with songs about drinking, football, aggro, sex and class. Oi!, which was at its core apolitical, united punks and skinheads. One perhaps unforeseen consequence, largely due to the music's often openly aggressive stance, was that some Oi! bands like the 4-Skins began to gather neo-fascist followings. Bands were forced to define their political affiliation and some bands even decided to break up as the only way to cast aside these often unwelcome new audiences.

This split led to a schism of the skinhead subculture into a number of distinct and opposing factions: traditional skinheads – following the apolitical first stance of the skinhead subculture; SHARP – Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, assuming an anti-racist stance while refusing to engage in organised politics; RASH – Red Anarchist Skinheads, turning towards left-wing politics and actively combating racism; and neo-fascist skinheads, labelled by other skinhead factions with the derogatory term of 'boneheads' – due to their fully shaved rather than close-cropped heads. This split produced some of the most active and committed anti-fascist Oi! groups, such as the Oppressed, who imported the SHARP movement from the US into the UK. [1]

In common with a number of other subcultures displaying a strong sense of commitment and loyalty, the discourse of authenticity is ever-present within the skinhead scene. Faced with a movement with radically oppositional political views, from neo-fascist skinheads to Red Anarchist Skinheads, gestures claiming the subculture from one particular viewpoint are constant.

Both opposing factions claim the legacy of the traditional skinhead, and hence a kind of ownership over its history and politics. In 1980, Bulldog: The Paper of the Young National Front claimed that "Nobody would deny that skinheads are racist!" (Bulldog c.1980: 3). In contrast, SHARP, RASH and traditional skinheads will claim the direct lineage with the rude boys and black skinheads of the late 1960s as a proof of authenticity and distinguish themselves from neo-fascist skinheads mostly by association with longstanding crossover musical styles such as reggae and ska.

Within restricted and tightly defined subcultures, the use of codes is specialised. Distinctions between political allegiances are very clear to those within the subculture – whether by fashion, graphics or music – but are frequently misunderstood by outside observers. The same codes are frequently reclaimed. As an example, the same photograph by Nick Knight, from a Sunday 'mod bashing' in Bethnal Green in 1981, was used for the album Oi! Oi! Music by the anti-fascist Oi! band the Oppressed, released in 1984, and subsequently used again for the cover of a neo-fascist skinhead split album between English Rose and Kill Baby Kill, Good Night Left Side, released in 2006. Similarly, two compilation albums both entitled United Skins use an image by Mick Furbanks. The first, released on the Boots and Braces label in 1982, marked the advent of nationalist skinheads; the second, a contemporary release, replaces the original European and Commonwealth flags with flags characteristic of the Red Anarchist Skinheads movement.

Footnotes

1. Although the 'enforced' political awareness of skinheads had its beginning during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the categorisation of these factions occurred later. Both anti racist groups emerged first in the US – the term SHARP was first used in 1986 and RASH during the early 1990s.

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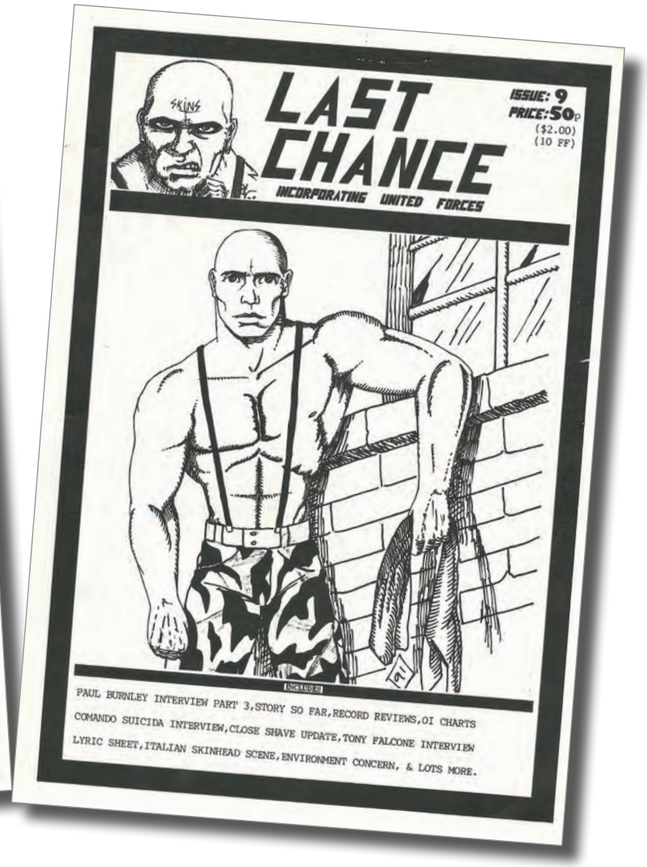
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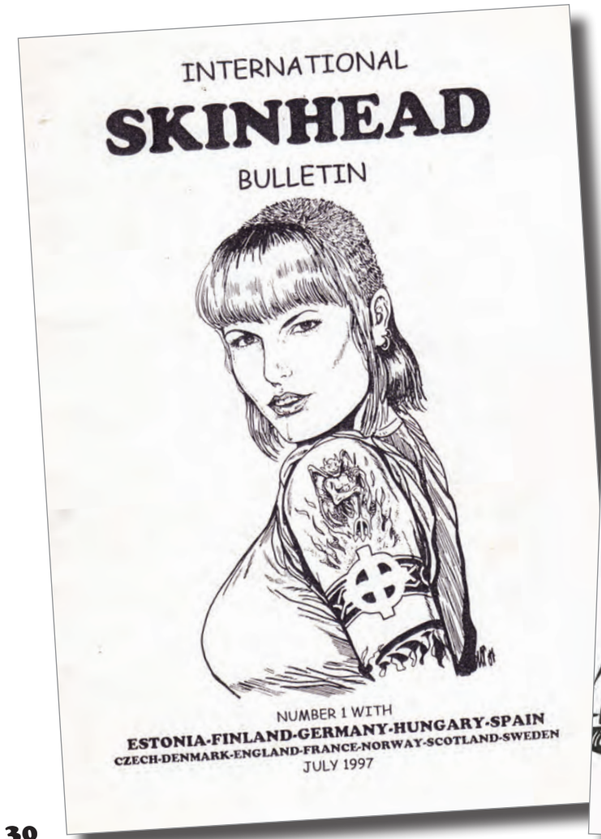
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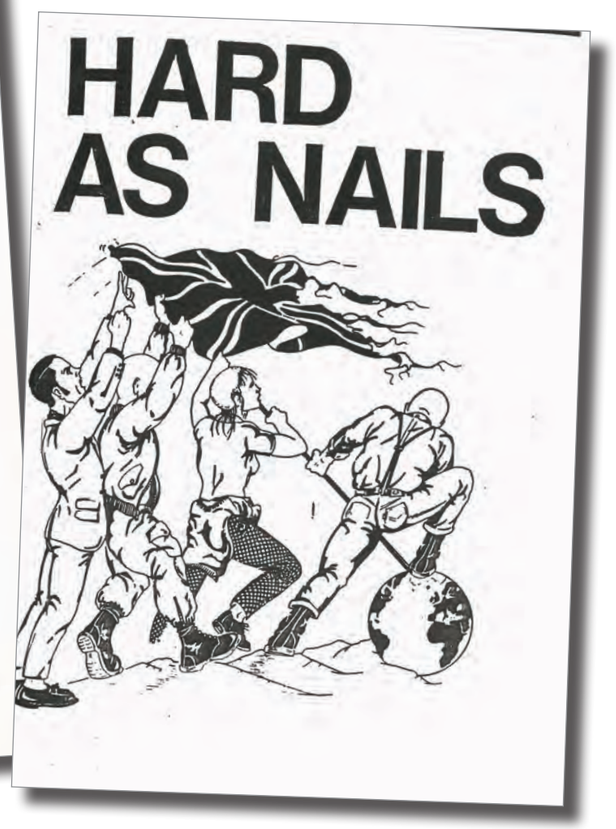
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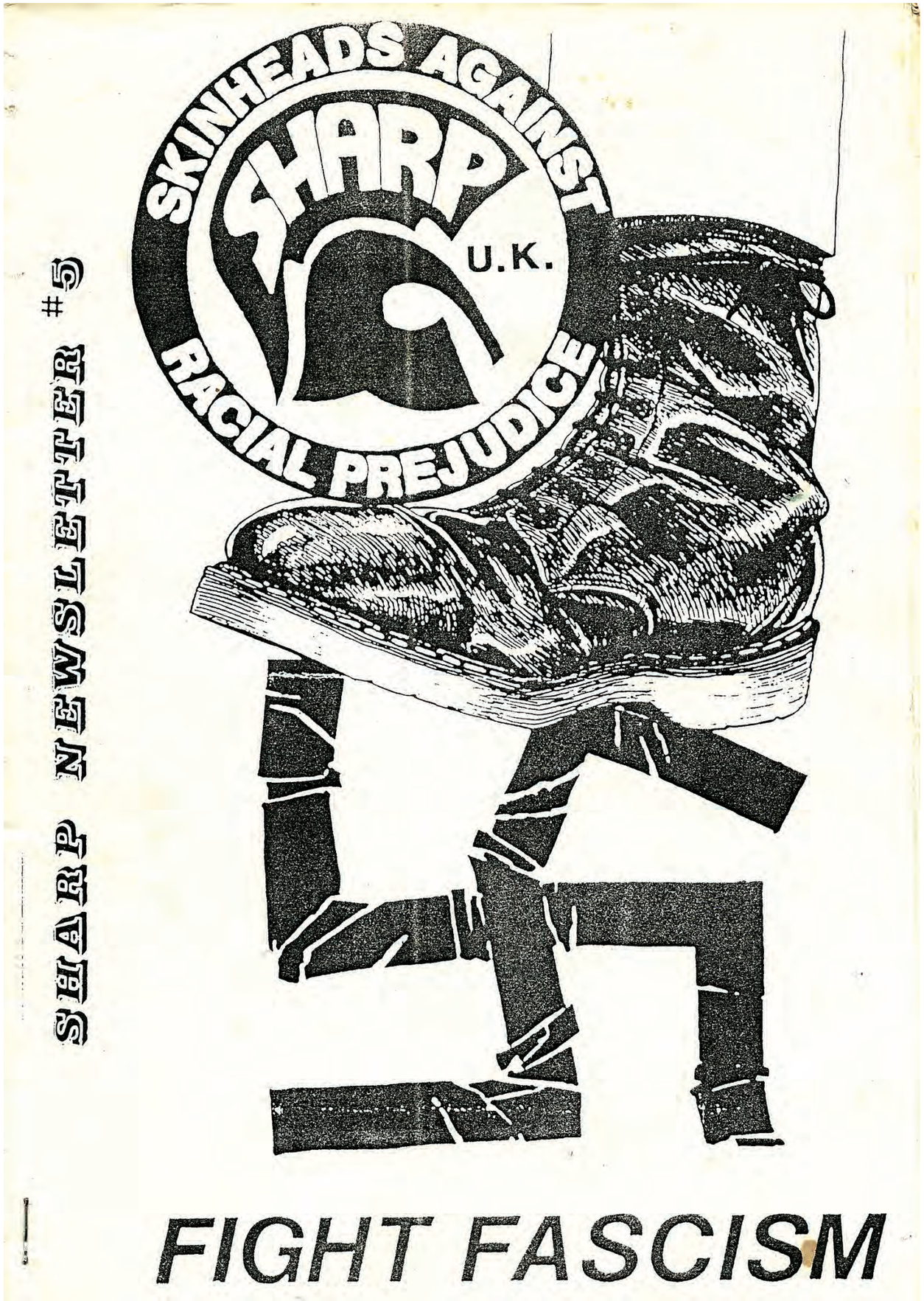
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