

Introducing The Greys

As you can see Aylesbury Town Matters now has a comic strip called "The Greys", created by two long-term local residents, Mark Crutch and Vince Mealing. This comic began life way back in 1994 as a means to learn more about creating art using a computer. It ran to about a dozen finished strips, but wasn't released to the public.

In November 2008 The Greys was resurrected as a webcomic. A few months was spent updating some of the older strips, and drawing some

new ones. Finally in May 2009 the webcomic went live, with a new strip posted at least every fortnight since then.

The online comics are sci-fi themed, but with a mixture of jokes to appeal to all tastes. For the strips in Town Matters, however, Mark and Vince are specifically aiming their jokes at some of the sights and sounds that will be familiar to Aylesbury residents. "Because our main characters are aliens", explains Mark, "we can use them to look at

our everyday surroundings with an unfamiliar eye. The Greys can have a different outlook on commonplace things that we otherwise take for granted."

There's more to The Greys than most comic strips, however. The drawings are released under a "Creative Commons" license, which allows them to be freely used, copied, translated and modified for personal use. "We don't just produce a printed picture," said Vince, "we also share the file that was used to create that picture. Anyone can visit our website and download the original artwork files for our comics."

"We're keen for people to experiment with their computers," Mark continued. "Too many people spend a small fortune on a machine, then just use it for Facebook and email. A computer – even a cheap or old one – can be a wonderful creative tool. If people can download our comics, pick them apart and learn from them, perhaps some of those people might go on to create comics or other drawings of their own."

In support of this egalitarian approach to computing, The Greys is created using an "Open Source" graphics program called "Inkscape" which can be downloaded free of charge from www.inkscape.org

The Inkscape file for the Town Matters comics – and for all the other strips – can be downloaded from Mark and Vince's website at www.peppertop.com

Facebook users can also sign up to be notified when new strips are posted on the website at facebook.com/TheGreysComic

Hilary Trahair

