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Abstract: Underground, overground : Remembering the Wombles

The Wombles was a dominant cultural force in 1970s Britain. From simple beginnings in a collection of short stories by Elizabeth Beresford to a successful animated series on the BBC. From the release of the show's theme tune to becoming one of the biggest selling artists of 1974. From a merchandising phenomenon to big screen stardom in *Wombling Free* (1977), the Womble effect encapsulated many of the cultural artefacts of the decade.

This paper will trace the impact of the Wombles and how they were positioned in relation to current events of the 1970s – as environmentalists with the Keep Britain Tidy campaign, as advocates of traditional hard work in an age of strikes and three-day weeks, as supporters of British and European unity (French womble Madame Cholet is an integral part of the Wimbledon burrow, while MacWomble is a regular visitor), and as post-modern commentators on cultural texts such as the James Bond series, Hollywood musicals, the Beatles and glam rock.

Rather than behind the times, *The Wombles* was ahead of them, one of the first British children's products to expand beyond one cultural format. Looking primarily at the visual and aural depiction of these furry icons, the paper will consider how different media changed and adapted the Womble brand, moving them from their underground animated roots to overground (live action) fame on *Top of the Pops* and at UK cinemas.