

Hollis Croft: a matter of time – archaeological comic book



'Sheffield, mid-19th century, the peak of the steel industry that both built and scarred the city. Dark streets and darker attitudes smother life in the grimy tenements and back streets. A young woman, Neive, leaves the poverty of her parents' home in West Ireland to seek work in the industrial cities of Northern England. She finds herself in Sheffield, having to hide her femininity to get work in steel cementation factories, she must also hide her forbidden love.'

An unlikely salvation occurs to her in the shape of a famous circus impresario...'

Hollis Croft: a matter of time is a unique comic book, published as a final excavation report, which aims to engage new audiences with a tale of history, female identity and the survival of people who lived and worked in the UK's industrial towns and cities during the 19th century. It is a thought-provoking look at both untold queer history and the universal experiences of many people living in harsh and difficult conditions in Victorian Sheffield.

Archaeologist and comic book enthusiast Mili Rajic weaves a human story into the archaeological remnants and artefacts uncovered by Wessex Archaeology on a site in Sheffield in 2017. The author uses the factual historical and archaeological evidence from an excavation she managed at Hollis Croft, Ordnance Survey maps and written records to reconstruct the site and the local landscape and to inform the story.

The comic features a cast of historical characters including Pablo Fanque, the circus owner who brought his show to Sheffield, and Madame Naomi, a palmist who lived on nearby West Street.

The story itself follows an imagined young woman, Neive, who leaves Ireland to seek work and finds herself having to hide her femininity to work in the steel cementation factories in Sheffield. She must also hide her forbidden love for Liz.

The comic is imagined as a different way of connecting people with the past and its archive, in a way that is hopefully easier to understand and more accessible. Technical archaeological reports rarely reach the wider



public at the best of times, and when they do, they can be complicated and sometimes very dry. *Hollis Croft: a matter of time* was created out of a need to get more people excited and engaged in archaeology, because the stories and potential stories are just sitting there in archives, waiting to be explored.

A digital version of the comic, hosted by *Internet Archaeology*, links the historic Hollis Croft with its archaeological archive and historical records of the area and the time. Just as grey literature directly links with the actual site archive, an X on the 12 full-page illustrations in the online viewer marks the 'clickable spot'. When selected, these take the reader straight to the archive or other documents and images concerning the site and the project.

The book is available free online on *Internet Archaeology* (<https://bit.ly/3cF84Co>) and to order from Oxbow Books (<https://bit.ly/2RXdGB2>).

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