Introduction

This comic book is dedicated to those whose world is not the mainstream.

The book was created out of boredom and out of feeling down and is a work of fiction. Places in the book are as they were in 1875 and 1850. I have done my best to reconstruct Victorian Hollis Croft in Victorian Sheffield by using archaeological evidence, historic Ordnance Survey maps and written records. Names and characters are products of my imagination apart from Pablo Fanque (circus owner) and Madame Naomi (palmist) who are historical figures.

All characters are used fictitiously.

This book would have not happened without the help of many people. I hope I haven’t forgotten anyone. If I have, I apologise sincerely.

To the Wessex Archaeology team who excavated the site at Hollis Croft, thank you for all your hard work and comradery. To everyone from post-excitation, reporting, illustration and archiving archaeological teams, thank you for putting all the puzzles together.

To my friends who had to go through listening to me developing the story and the characters and to those who were also exposed to reading the early material, I am not sure you’ve helped at all, but thank you.

To Gavin Johnson, thank you for securing a chunk of the financial support for this book.

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To the Jewitt family (Penny, Chris and the boys), thank you for letting me read the amazing Footprint Tools Archive and for making me feel part of the gang.

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To Paul Rowland, thank you for being omnipresent and for being a good friend with Dave Howarth.

To Dave Howarth... well, if it was not for you this would have never happened. Thank you, Dave.

And thank you to Caroline O’Keeffe for rescuing me in all moments of doubt.

If you wish to see how this story looks as a real and actual site archive and you are reading this book digitally, just click on X (You’ll find them on the full splash pages). or go to https://archaeologydataeservice.ac.uk/archives/view/wessexar1-309354/ This will take you to and through a full archaeological report, illustrations and photos.

If you are reading this book as a printed-out version and wish to explore more about Hollis Croft, the physical archive is deposited with Museums Sheffield under SHEFM.2019.13 and Sheffield Archives.

MR
Sheffield, 2020
The Dig

In Summer 2017 Hollis Croft Street became a construction site.

...for a sparkling new student accommodation block.

But before that, it was a large-scale archaeological excavation.

Because Hollis Croft is an important part of Sheffield’s heritage.

...and the remains were preserved.
...ARCHAEOLOGISTS NEED TO RECORD IT

THE WORK WAS MONITORED BY ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORS TO THE PLANNING OFFICE OF SHEFFIELD COUNCIL. THEY MADE FREQUENT VISITS

IT TOOK 5 MONTHS, 25 ARCHAEOLOGIST, LARGE MACHINES, SHOVELS, MATTOCKS, TROWELS, DIGITAL RECORDING, PHOTOGRAPHY, DRAWING AND OTHER WORK TO COMPLETE THE EXCAVATION

YES, BETWEEN YOUR LAST VISIT AND NOW, WE HAVE CLEANED THE AREA A BIT MORE... AND THESE ARE DEFINITELY CEMENTATION FURNACES

OH, AND HERE IS A WALL OF THAT PUB WE COULD SEE ON THE OLD MAP... THE COCK... THAT'S THE WALL... NOT MUCH OF IT LEFT, BUT IT'S THERE
I am tired... I’ve had enough of all this... 

...but you love it!... circus is your life... 

...exactly, that’s why I’m tired... 

...the money is good!!
BAH!... YES ‘COS NOW I’M ENTERTAINING THE MIDDLE CLASS

SHEFFIELD’S GOT A MIDDLE CLASS??
AND LIVERPOOL.... AND MANCHESTER

YES, BUT SHEFFIELD IS YOUR FAVOURITE ISN’T IT?
PABLO, DO TELL, IF IT WASN’T FOR THAT SWEET WIFE OF YOURS, WOULD WE STILL HAVE THE JOY OF YOUR PRESENCE?

OF COURSE, I WAS HERE BEFORE I FELL IN LOVE

FELL IN LOVE?? HA HA HA HA.... YOU’RE TOO OLD FOR THAT RUBBISH! YOU ARE A MARRIED MAN, WHAT’S THAT TO DO WITH LOVE??

THUD

I AM TIRED!....

YOU SHOULD TAKE A BREAK, GO HAVE FUN.... I KNOW OF A GOOD PLACE.... THERE’S A CIRCUS IN TOWN. YOU SHOULD GO SEE THEM, THEY SAY THEIR PRODUCTION IS SECOND TO NONE.
I am done... I am finishing after the last benefit gig in a couple of days and I am leaving in a couple of weeks. Circus is killing me.

Oh, that was a short and sweet stay, this time.

Short? Sweet? Three months, show twice a day... short?? and sweet? In Sheffield? Nothing is sweet here. Had to put up with your face behind the bar every night for a start!

I love taking all your hard earned pounds... love it.

Enjoy it while it lasts... you'll have to find someone else to talk to you miserable b**. Be nice to me or I'll go across the way to Harrison's Orange Branch.

Bah!... suit yourself.

Thank you Liz... you are lucky to have such a beautiful daughter.
TO MAKE 'EM WE ARE WILLIN'  
A BASKET FULL FOR A SHILLIN'  
RED HERRINGS AND POTATOES  
OUR BELLIES TO BE FILLIN'  

PABLO
NO... NOT HERE... MY FATHER IS GOING TO SEE US
HE WON'T COME OUT, HE'S WITH PABLO

PLEASE DON'T... SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING TO SEE US... I AM WORRIED

SO ARE WE GOING TO HIDE FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD TOO?

OUR WORLD IS SMALL... EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYONE IN OUR WORLD

THEN WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT!
I'm scared Connor!

Don't say that name...

Why scared? There's nothing to be scared of...

Apart from the fact you're...

SHHH SHH SHUSH
SEE... THIS IS WHY I AM SCARED... DAD CAN'T STAND YOU...

YOUR FATHER CAN'T STAND ANYONE WHO COMES NEAR YOU... IT'S NOT JUST ME

I DIDN'T MEAN THAT, I'M SORRY... WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS

IT IS YOU! 'COS I DON'T LET ANYONE ELSE COME ANYWHERE NEAR ME!

LIZ
LIZ!!
I NEED TO GO BACK IN NOW....

LIZ!
WHERE IS SHE!!

DO YOU LOVE ME?

YES....

THEN TELL ME...

OF COURSE I LOVE YOU.... WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING .... DON'T WORRY
Hey! Watch out then!

P*** off!!!

Watch where you go!

Watch where you go... softy.

Ha ha ha ha ha

Ha ha ha
WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?

BY YOUR NAME SOFTY!

SOFTY’S BRAVE!

OH... PLEASE DO!
WELL... LET'S HAVE A CHAT SHALL WE?

I'LL NOW TEACH YOU HOW TO BE A REAL MAN!
The Room

SOFTY! COME OUT!

CREEEAK...

KEEP OUT
OH SPARE ME THAT... PLEASE...

SIT DOWN... I WANT TO TALK TO YOU

THAT WAS CLOSE... YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL...

THIS STREET IS DANGEROUS AS IT IS...

BUT YOU NEED TO BE EXTRA CAREFUL

I AM.... FINE....

REALLY?

REALLY?

I'VE NOT SEEN ANYONE SO NOT FINE IN AGES.... TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED WHY DON'T YOU?

NOTHING HAPPENED.... NOTHING!....
Oh look... I know it will come to you... eventually... but just for the record.

I am asking you to tell me what happened to you... from the beginning.

You know well what I mean, I know you know I know everything about everyone here...

That's my job!...

What?... what do you mean?

...Nothing personal, just a job like any other... it is just that every so often I like to check....

...Check how good I am in guessing the past and predicting the future... just for my own record.

So... Connor... or should I, for the sake of my argument....

--- I saved your life... I want nothing in return for that little deed... just stop saying "nothing happened"... plus I am not asking about what just happened... I saw it with my eyes...
I have just told you that I know your secrets!! You really need to start paying attention... if you want to survive here... if you want to survive being in love with Liz....

Pay attention to what people say! Pay attention to what they try to say... and most importantly to what they're deliberately not saying! So... my ego would love to know how brilliant the rest of me is....

Start talking... from the god forsaken Ireland to the god forsaken Hollis Croft. Everything. And don't lie, 'cause I know... and don't drag it out... I have customers coming!

Aargh... come here!...
...YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY?... MANY GIRLS END UP WORKING THE NIGHT...
Hollis Croft finds are in!

Oh good... we need to sort them out and start processing them...

Any goodies?

Leaks! There is a medieval coin too!

A medieval coin? From 19th-century Sheffield??

Yeah... a long cross penny everyone is really surprised...

That's a fake

Urgh... really?
YEAH, NO CHANCE IT'S REAL... MEDIEVAL COINS IN INDUSTRIAL SHEFFIELD... PFFFFT

IT LOOKS REAL TO ME

IT'S A VERY GOOD FAKE!

HA HA HAHA

WHERE'S IT FROM?

...ERM... AH, CONTEXT 1976? WHAT'S THAT?

LET ME CHECK

KEEPING OLD FAKE MONEY AS A SOUVENIR...

I BET IT'S REAL!

--- THE COCK PUB!

SHOULD WE CHECK WHAT IT'S MADE OF?

HOW DO WE DO THAT WITHOUT DAMAGING THE COIN?

OH!... I KNOW.... DUNNO....
TAKE IT TO THE EXPERTS FOR IDENTIFICATION!

...I’LL DO IT RIGHT NOW!

WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

CLAY PIPES....

....THEY’RE COOL!

POTTERY.... SOME LEATHER SHOES....

OH A FRAGMENT OF CROZZLE.... THAT SHOULD BE A SAMPLE.... SOME GLASS

AND.... OHH LOOK AT THESE
THAT'S NICE...

YUP...

THEY'RE LARGE.... NOT CUTLERY.... THESE ARE LARGE HANDLES

RIGHT!... IT'S REAL.... LOOK!

OKAY YOU WIN.... BUT WE ALL LOSE BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE MADE MORE SENSE.... IF IT WAS FAKE

IT'S ANOTHER MYSTERY....

LIKE THESE HANDLES.......

OKAY, RIGHT.... WE BETTER DO SOME ACTUAL WORK TODAY!
The Circus
ONE SMOOTH MOVEMENT OR THE HORSE WILL SENSE YOU AND WILL NOT OBED YOU!

OKAY.... KEEP DOING THE SAME! PRACTICE.... PRACTICE!! THIS NEEDS TO BECOME SECOND NATURE TO YOU! PRACTICE! PRACTICE!!

KEEP MOVING! KEEP GOING.... STAY IN MOTION!
DONE FOR TODAY... SEE YOU ALL LATER!

MR FANQUE... I... WE... MY GIRLFRIEND AND I WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR CIRCUS SIR...

WHAT?... WHO ARE YOU? GO AWAY!

I AM... I KNOW HOW TO MAKE THINGS.... AND SHE IS NICE....

WAIT... AND SHE IS “NICE”?? WHAT THE...? HAHA HA HAHA HA HA HAHA! I DON'T NEED ANY OF THAT.... ESPECIALLY I DON'T NEED “NICE”!!...“NICE”? HAHA HA HAHA HA HAHA!

WHAT?... ARE YOU DRUNK OR SOMETHING? WHAT ON EARTH IS WRONG WITH YOU? WHO ON EARTH ARE YOU?--

... YOU KNOW HOW TO “MAKE” THINGS?

I CAN MAKE KNIVES... I CAN MEND THINGS... ERMM SHE IS GOOD ON THE TILL.... WE WILL NOT BE IN YOUR WAY MR FANQUE SIR....
Two more mouths to feed? I have too many mouths to feed already....

We don't need food just to not be... just to be with you... with the circus... we will be shadows... useful shadows.

I can make you brand new knives sir.

I don't need new knives.

But sir you haven't seen these knives... made of steel... longer lasting.

I'll make them in no time... show them to you... it won't cost you a penny sir... you decide... if they're good... please, take me and Liz.

Who is Liz now?

My girlfriend.

But... if you are yet another liar... another time waster... then stay away from me... and stay away from my circus!

If that is so... well then, suppose fine you have until the end of the week, because then I leave... with or without you!
So this is how Hollis Croft looked back then?

Yes... famous crofts...

...these are the back-to-back houses with a shared yard.

The street is a curving line.

That's because it follows the shape of the post-Medieval field which is formed by enclosing strips, with a former open or town field.
OH I SEE...
SO THESE PLOTS ARE ACTUAL
FIELDS AND THE STREETS ARE
THE PATHS BETWEEN?

YEP... THE AREA ALREADY HAD
COURTS IN THE LATE 19TH
CENTURY. THEN IN THE 19TH
CENTURY THERE’S A MIXTURE OF
DOMESTIC, COMMERCIAL AND, I
SUPPOSE, INDUSTRIAL... CUTLERY,
KNIVES, FILES AND HAND TOOLS
WERE MADE... AND, OF COURSE,
SEVERAL PUBS!

WAT IS THIS THEN?
CIRCUS TENTS?

HAAA...
WELL, FUNNY YOU SHOULD
SAY THAT,
NO THESE ARE ACTUALLY
CEMENTATION
FURNACES...?
DO YOU MEAN THE TWO
CLOCKS?

YEP...

YES, THEY ARE THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE TWO FURNACES
WHERE IRON BARS WERE CONVERTED INTO STEEL...
BLISTER STEEL... A SIMPLE PROCESS BUT A HARD WORK!
THIS STUFF IS ALL OVER SHEFFIELD!
CHIMNEYS EVERYWHERE... FURNACES...
WE FOUND THOSE TWO AT HOLLIS CROFT... WELL
PRESERVED. SHEFFIELD IS FAMOUS BECAUSE OF IT
...IT WAS LIKE...

HOLD ON... I HEAR YOU KNOW EVERYTHING
ABOUT THIS... THANK YOU, CAN I GO BACK AND
FINISH WHAT I HAVE TO DO?... YOU CAN TELL
ME OVER A PINT LATER?

SURE... I GIVE YOU THE INFO... YOU BUY THE PINTS!

I’M NOT THAT DESPERATE
TO KNOW THAT STUFF... BUT OKAY... IT’S A DEAL!
The Factory

PACK THAT TIGHT!! NO AIR IN!!
OH LORD, I AM KNACKERED! THIS DIRTY COAL IS BREAKING MY BACK! HOW MUCH MORE IS THERE TO SHOVEL OUT? WHY IS HE USING THIS CHEAPEST STUFF? BECAUSE YOUR BACK IS CHEAPER THAN THAT COAL... NOW SHUT UP!

...AND KEEP SHOVELLING!!
Hey! Who is that? What’s going on??

I was... ermm... just tidying up the yard!

Go home! You’ll be complaining tomorrow! Make you work overtime and don’t pay!... go home!! Do you ‘ere me?
Liz... Look!!

--They are going to free us are they?

Are the knives supposed to help us Connor?

These throwing knives are going to get us into Pablo's circus and out of here Liz!

R... Right....

They are going to cut our ties with the past....

...Right....

And make a better future for us, we'll be together and we'll be happy Liz.... Everything will be flowers and rainbows.

Are you just going completely mad?

What?... Err... No.... Why?

Why?... Because we are going to join the circus? Because you show me knives, which are somehow getting us out of here? You don't know what you are saying Connor!

I do.... I want you... Us... I want a better life... no more hiding... I've done what I said and now all I need to do is go to Pablo's office at dawn. He's leaving with the circus... and so are we Liz! We'll give him the knives... we can go too then... Can't we Liz?... Liz....
I know we did... but... I'm frightened. My life is here... my father... the pub... he needs my help... me and you have nothing... you just about know what you are doing at the furnace... this is dangerous... we nearly got caught the other day!

We agreed?? You said you'd come with me?

It is dangerous here... but there must be a place... a place we can just... be...

There is danger everywhere!

I don't know what I'm doing?! Oh thank you. Who made these Liz? Who sorted all this out? We have nothing... but we will have something very, very soon Liz.

Two men... they were hanged not so long ago. You know!

I'm not running away! But I am putting up with misery and injustice! I might not be able to change it... but I am not going to let it change me!!

Yes but that is two men... no one knows me, us... if they did, they would think we are just friends.

You need to stop... stop running away Connor!

You're not going to let it change you?? Look at yourself! What's your name? Who are you? How do you look?? Aaargh!

I won't be allowed to return... it will not be me returning... it'll be someone else.

Please Liz, I can't do this on my own... what's changed? You were okay? You can always return?

You can visit... please come... I love you Liz.

Come on... we can do this Liz... I'll be at Pablo's at dawn. I'll wait for you and we will do this together Liz...

...I'll be there....
MAKE SURE THAT THIS TIME WE HAVE ALL OUR GEAR WITH US! I DON’T WANT TO HAVE TO IMPROVISE AGAIN YOU HEAR?

Oi!... ARE YOU TRAVELLING LIKE THAT?

YES!... I DIDN’T HAVE TIME TO CHANGE!

...AND THERE’S NO SPACE FOR THE COSTUME!

HOW IS IT THAT EVEN WITH YOU LOT FORGETTING THINGS, WE SEEM TO HAVE MORE STUFF THAN WE ARRIVED WITH??

The Circles
IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO RAIN NOW!

...SO WHERE IS THAT BOY?... AND HIS GIRLFRIEND?... WHY DO I DO THIS TO MYSELF?

GET OUT OF THE WAY!!
Oi!!! What's your panic? Where are you off to?

Sorry! I'll be back...

No... No, I won't be back... I'll see you... maybe... I don't know... I don't know!!
I will be there... I will... just not now...

It's been thirty six weeks... two days... and seven hours.
ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT... IS YOU...

I CAN NEVER SLEEP...

...AND I MISS YOU!!!
The Author

Milica (Mili) Rajic is an archaeologist. She reads an unhealthy number of comics, likes prime numbers and odd things. She lives in Sheffield and is deliberately getting old.

The Artist

Dave Howarth is a cartoonist and illustrator. He buys and listens to an unhealthy number of records, likes real ale and live music. He’s Sheffield born and bred and is old.
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 also must hide her forbidden love.

An unlikely salvation occurs to her in the shape of a famous circus impresario... but will her plan lead her to a new life?

Archaeologist Milica (Mili) Rajic imagines a human story entwined within the archaeological remnants and artefacts uncovered in the heavily industrialised Victorian Sheffield.