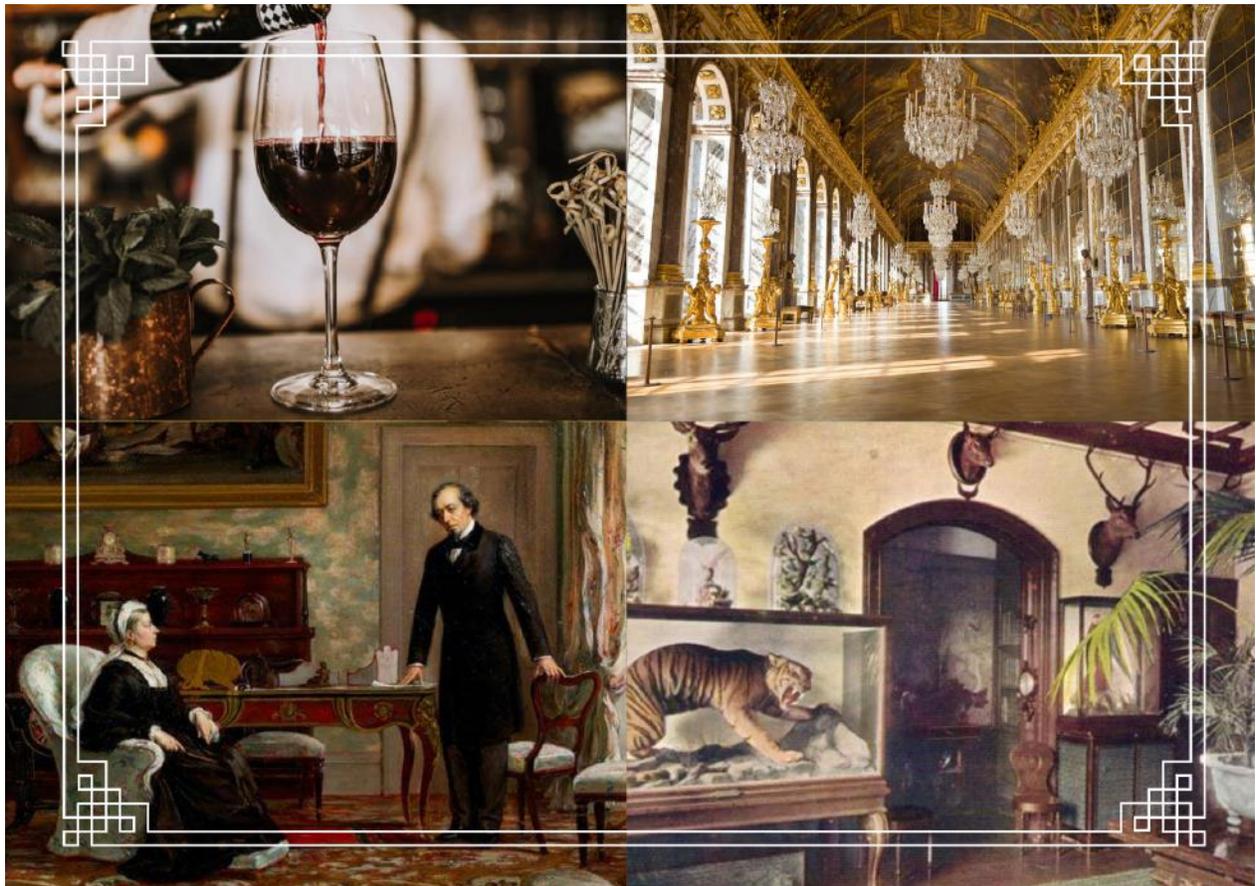


# Hedonistic Histories

PROJECT REPORT

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**PREPARED FOR: FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

Newcastle University / Great North Museum: Hancock

08.08.22

# HEDONISTIC HISTORIES

THE TAXIDERMISTRY AND TIPPLES EVENT



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# Hedonistic Histories

## Summary

The purpose of this report is to evidence and evaluate the *Hedonistic Histories* project, and its primary output, 'Taxidermy & Tipples'. The report comprises of a portfolio of evidence, including: email correspondences between supervisors and suppliers, budget information, social media engagement, website development, blog progress, and pictures and feedback from the event.

'Taxidermy & Tipples' was the pilot event for the *Hedonistic Histories* series, held at the Great North Museum: Hancock (GNM). It introduced the research topic on replicated hedonistic cultures across time periods, attracting an interested public and an audience aged 18-30. The event covered taxidermy's origin, the place it held within eighteenth and nineteenth-century homes, and its modern-day resurgence. The audience benefited from engaging activities, including an object handling, wine tasting and a photograph opportunity. There was also a detailed history on taxidermy's past, and contextual history on wine consumption within the nineteenth-century, and how this had been impacted by the warmongering tactics and import duties implemented by Louis XIV (the comparative within this research project).

As the project resolves, it has ultimately achieved all intended aims (outlined in 'Aims and Objectives'), and surpassed expected engagement. Although a resounding success, it did not occur without challenges, including long gaps in communication and multiple changes to the possibilities of 'Taxidermy & Tipples' from Senior Management, which meant that productive physical planning could not be implemented until three weeks before the event, (publishing the booking link, advertising, and purchasing the necessary components for the event). Despite this constraint, regular contributions to the digital repository were created, resulting in a diverse selection of outputs to ensure the project's legacy. Challenges discussed within this report can be combatted more effectively in future events, through the valuable and professional relationships that were developed between myself, the partners and suppliers.

# Introduction



Whilst hedonism as concept has many contested narratives in philosophy and psychology, the overarching premise of this project's research presents 'Hedonistic Histories' as a new theory. It ascertains that within the elite, aristocratic and noble classes, there is a culture of hedonism which has been replicated across time periods to maintain their power and status, preserving generations of elite rule. The research for the *Hedonistic Histories* project began in February 2022, with the output's conceptualisation implemented from 01/03/22. Supervisors and partners were contacted to assess what was possible within the timeframe (see Appendix 1 and 2). The research found in this project is significant to both historical theory and engaging the public, as it introduces a new way to explore the past which is novel in historiography and exciting to a non-academic audience too. The report evaluates how successful the project has been so far in communicating the research to its intended audience, through the 'Taxidermy & Tipples' event and digital outputs. The *Hooked on Hedonism* blog and @hedonistic.histories Instagram pages will continue to be updated to retain public engagement, and promote future events for the *Hedonistic Histories* series, which are currently being planned with the GNM (see Appendix 3 and 4).

# Aims and Objectives

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As a large part of this project was created with support from, and in collaboration with the Great North Museum: Hancock, the aims and objectives have been divided into Research Aims, Project Aims, and Personal Aims. This aids the differentiation between the event and project's outputs.

All of the aims are outlined in more detail throughout the report, and their outcomes have been evaluated. The museum was particularly pleased that their target audience was met, and that none of their usual audience was in attendance (see Appendix 5 and report from Ruth).



To demonstrate how hedonism was performed as a symbol of power



To encourage public interest in the ongoing research



To reach an interested public, academic or general (my aim), and the age group of 18-30 (partner's target audience, since their typical audience is families)



To put on a successful and professional event at the GNM



To create a website which followed the progress of the event



To support local businesses where possible, by using their branding and products



To become familiarised with new software, such as: Artificial Intelligence programs, Adobe Suite Pro, Adobe Express, InDesign and Photoshop



To develop website building skills and basic html coding abilities



To create future events for Hedonistic Histories with the GNM and other Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) organisations



## Outcomes

Approaching the project, I wanted to engage physically with the intended public without limiting the number of people that could benefit from the project. To achieve this, I needed a strong physical and digital presence.

The website was created as a platform to organise, and preserve the legacy of, the project. However, to maintain my online public's interest, a social media page was created to regularly engage with them in a personal way.

Creating an event felt more personal and less disconnected than the digital outputs. However, the digital repository expanded the size of my audience, and provided platforms with further information.



### Event

The pilot event was the primary outcome of the project. It was well received, and the series will continue to engage with the audience through physical activities.



### Website

The website is as a widely accessible home for all of the information surrounding *Hedonistic Histories*.



### Social Media

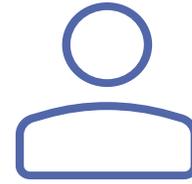
The *@hedonistic.histories* page was created to digitally involve the public, and achieves the difficult task of designing personalised and engaging online content.

## HEDONISTIC HISTORIES

# Taxidermy

&

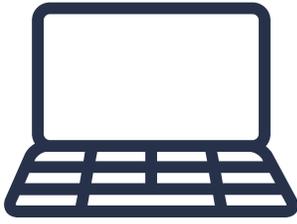
# Tipples



## Event

'Taxidermy & Tipples' was first conceptualised in March, but had to be re-conceptualised in June and July, as the partners were under pressure from their organisation, causing them to change both the scope and budget of the event (See Appendices 6-10). I received confirmation by 14/07/22 and the event occurred 04/08/22 (See Appendices 11 and 12). As the aims for the event were continued from its conceptualisation in March, it was possible to maintain the original concept, but with considerable budget cuts. There were often delays in the partner's responses as she was absent (See Appendices 13-16); this postponed productive communication with suppliers, as I had no access to the bookings, and could not confirm the necessary quantities required. Five suppliers were contacted for a quote per item needed on 14/07/21, including: wine, wine glasses, postcards, leaflets, flowers, vases and table cloths. Local suppliers who offered discounts were selected (See Appendix 17-20). The total cost was £201.54, which was £1.54 over budget (Appendix 21 and 22; refer to budget section). The event was conducted in a professional manner, with a recurring theme reinforced by the other outputs I created.

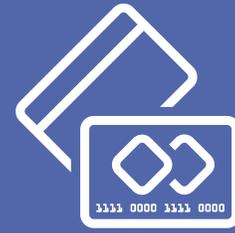
All visual designs were created by myself, this included: using an artificial intelligence algorithm that converted digital images into sketches and removed their backgrounds, designing the website, creating the wine tasting booklet, and creating postcards (See Appendices 23-25). To achieve this, I had to familiarise myself with new software (listed in 'personal aims'); the intention was to present a consistent and professional theme throughout the project, so that it became recognisable as part of *Hedonistic Histories*. This successfully met the outlined project and personal aims.



Total online audience:

**27**

(with 42 views since publishing;  
accurate from 26/08/22)



Total tickets sold:

**177%**

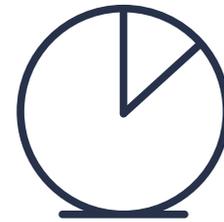
(30 sold out, so 20 more were added and  
sold out too)



Expenditure

**£201.54**

(£1.54 over budget)



Average event satisfaction

**100%**

(using data taken from the  
survey; available upon request)



The event programme, curated by myself, was as follows: an introduction to the research and project concept, presented by myself; an explanation of taxidermy's history, presented by Professor Annie Tindley; a taxidermy handling and drop-in, led by Ruth Sheldon; a Q&A session, led by the aforementioned speakers, and volunteer, Anna Robson; a wine tasting, led by myself; and a hedonistic 'photo booth', section of the room, with wine bottles and taxidermy (See Appendix 26). I presented the entire event as an immersive, multi-sensory experience, with six round tables which were laid with wine glasses, white table cloths, flowers in vases, wine tasting leaflets and programmes (See Appendices 23 and 27). As people entered the room, they were welcomed to the experience; classical music, an aroma of Sicilian lemon and lavender, and three screens displaying images of Versailles' interior, and nineteenth-century country homes (See Appendix 27 and 28). The scent and music were carefully selected to fit with the Baroque style of Versailles, and the refinement of nineteenth-century country homes; an Instagram post on the perfumed palace explained this multi-sensory experience (see social media section). This multi-sensory experience was well received and assisted in transporting people into the theme of the event, removing them from the context of the museum as they entered the room.

The event had an impressive turnout of 44 people out of the 50 tickets booked (of which 12 completed the survey from which the data is taken). In addition, there were 27 online viewers, and 42 more views one week after the event occurred (See Appendices 29 and 30). This result was an improvement from the expected turnout (refer to Ruth's report). There were initially only 3 ticket bookings (See Appendix 34); this was a disappointing performance as there were 30 tickets available. I responded to this by advertising the event on posters, social media, and through the university (See Appendix 35, and refer to advertising/social media sections). These efforts generated a 1616.6% increase in ticket sales; we responded by adding 20 more tickets, which also sold out (See Appendices 31-33).



As the online audience was a last minute addition, (following popular demand as tickets were limited), the programme did not incorporate them as well as it could have. I overcame the challenge of a hybrid event spontaneously, by speaking to the online audience when the room was loud, taking them on a tour of what was happening, ensuring they felt encouraged to ask questions (See Appendix 36), and that these questions were answered. Shortening the taxidermy drop in to a Q&A session was an effective way to engage the online audience, as they were then able to benefit from the information which was being shared in the room. To make the video easier to navigate after the event passed, I added time stamps so each section that new viewers want to find is easily accessible (See Appendix 37). Despite these positive efforts to capture a hybrid audience, the in-person experience was more carefully curated. Improvements on sound and video quality need to be made for future events, and considerations on how to make the wine tasting accessible to an online audience too; I had provided them in advance with the tasting leaflet and names of the wine, but this was up to their discretion to purchase it.

The audience was majority on target for the interested public, and 18-30 aims. There were a few people over 60, but this was the minority; this is not accurately evidenced by the survey as not everyone who attended the event completed it, but Ruth confirms this success in her report. As the typical museum audience is families, although not our aim, I prepared a 'colouring in' station relevant to the topic, with stencils and pencils ready should any children have been brought along (See Appendix 38). The event met its audience aims with resounding success, so the preparations I had made for the family audience were not needed. To live stream the event and take pictures, I had to comply with the 2021 Data Protection Act; I created a photograph consent form, which people signed on arrival (See Appendix 39). I also created PowerPoints for the event, to accompany the speeches and wine tasting with visual aids.

# Event Feedback



"A most novel approach to the academic study of Hedonism throughout history which was excellently presented by Abbie Blackwell. A welcoming entrance with lovely table settings, fresh flowers and a powerful aroma of herbs and spices greeted the guests and appealed to our senses. The collaboration with Ruth and Museum staff worked well and led to a most interesting Taxidermy handling session. There was great supporting work by Prof Annie Tindley who offered further insight into the history of Taxidermy. The whole event was thought provoking and raised many interesting questions which were handled very well by Abbie. And of course, the wine tasting heightened our pursuit of pleasure. A very well thought out afternoon, congratulations to Abbie for all her work."



"The event was a great mix of learning and social activities, providing a useful introduction to the topic of taxidermy and the complex histories surrounding their creation and display. The wine tasting provided a light-hearted way to continue conversations about taxidermy and hedonism and break up the session. It was also great to offer an object handling component and opportunity for participants to ask questions."



"This was a really interesting combination of practical / social wine-tasting and a individual take on the socio-historical importance of wine, a very enjoyable event!"



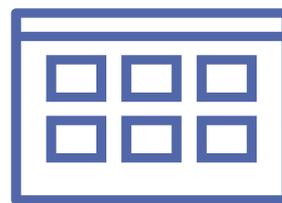
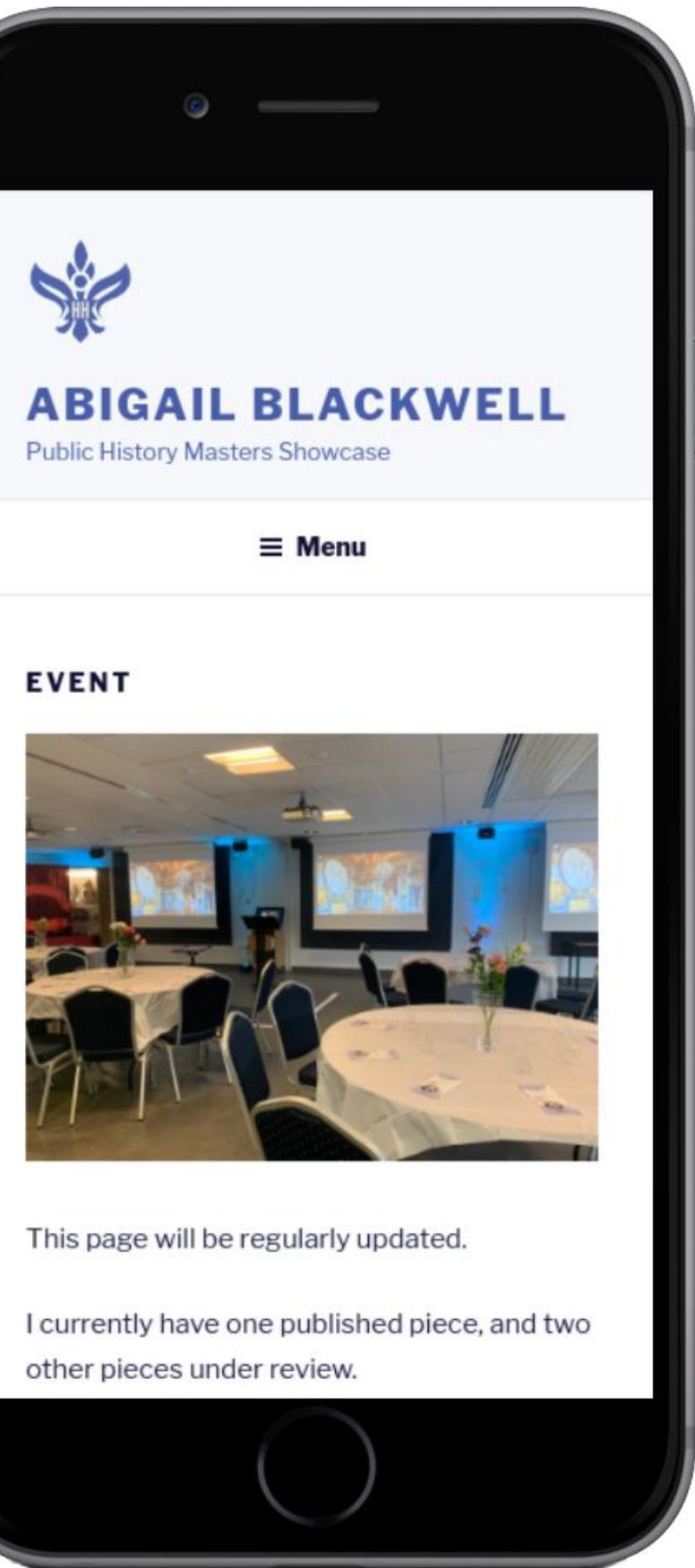
"Knowledgeable speakers, and great fun! All questions answered well"



"Every historical link made during the event was given an in-depth explanation and appropriate context in which to interpret the point that was being made"



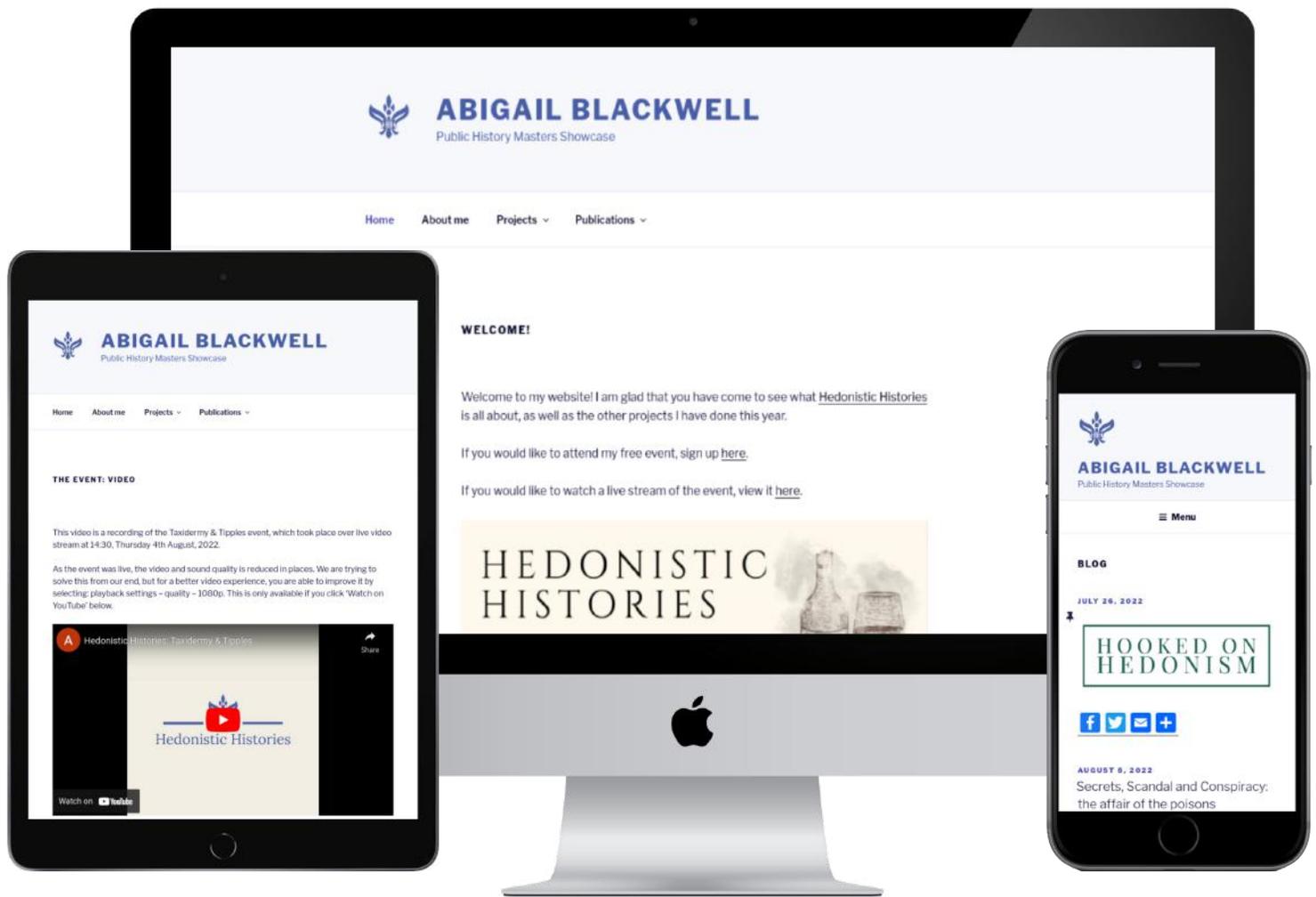
"Even though I was watching online and I couldn't always see what was going on the speeches were very informative and getting the taxidermy q&a on for the online audience helped me learn what the room was learning."



## Website

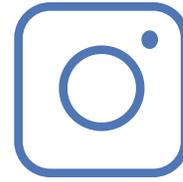
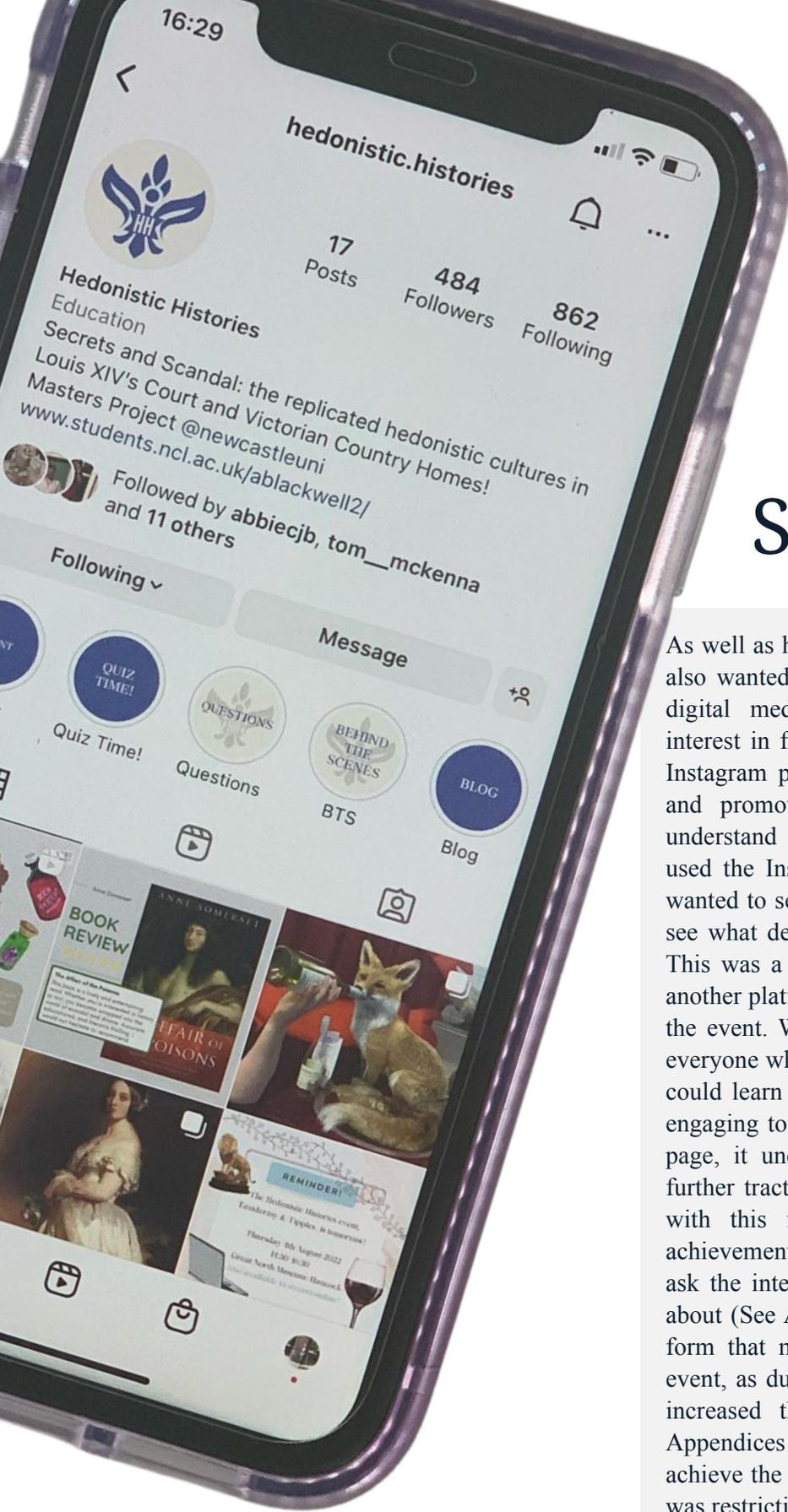
The website was created to organise and showcase the *Hedonistic Histories* project. It presents the research and digital repository in one location, which is visually engaging and easy to navigate. This is useful to systemise the project's outputs, whilst also directing the audience to the valuable tools that have been created for their benefit.

The website functions smoothly without lagging or producing standard website errors, and has an inviting front page with a menu that it is simple to follow (See Appendix 40). It assists in making the entire project easy to navigate, whilst presenting a consistent theme across all online channels, in keeping with the physical event. Although the WordPress templates are limiting, and refining all of the content was time consuming, this was an essential part of presenting an 'easy to use' website experience for the audience. This involved learning basic html coding, changing my writing style from academic to accessible for a public audience, and researching what is required for an effective website experience. The effort that went into the website was a success, as the final product is user-friendly, and promoted the event to an online audience.



The website hosts the *Hooked on Hedonism* blog and the resource page (refer to link in Appendix 40). The blog features project updates and guest writers, who contacted me on the Instagram page, volunteering to write (See Appendix 41 and 42). The resource page is an extended bibliography that is accessible to academics, and an interested public, organised according to the material type and period. It documents all the research completed, and suggests other forms of public history which could be enjoyed by a large interested audience, including podcasts, films, and novels. The website was also used as a platform to live stream my event. This was an embedded live video stream, that I hosted on YouTube but displayed on my website (See Appendix 43). This was valuable as it meant the online audience were already directed to my website, and could easily access the resources available to them. Post event, the live stream is now an embedded video recording of the event, which is available to watch on demand and adds to the event's legacy. Whilst this was a technically difficult result to achieve, it had the benefit of being simple to use and find, whilst also directing people to my website for further information.

The website, visual design, graphics, prints, and all social media posts were designed and created by myself in Adobe Express and Canva. Every page benefits from URL links and page anchors, to make the website easy to navigate, and provide a professional composition. The design of the website is also in keeping with the *Hedonistic Histories* theme, benefiting from minute details, such as the browser favicon being the logo I created (See Appendix 44). The Instagram page is also linked to the website, discussed further in the social media section of the report.



## Social Media

As well as having a public medium to increase engagement, I also wanted to be able to engage with the audience through digital mediums, to consolidate their knowledge, retain interest in future events, and ensure the projects legacy. The Instagram page was the most useful output when designing and promoting the event, as I could engage with and understand the audience by using the data analytic tools. I used the Instagram story function to ask what the audience wanted to see, which enabled me to increase engagement and see what demographic they formed (See Appendices 45-51). This was a valuable tool both in presenting my research on another platform, to interact with the audience, and to promote the event. When creating the account, the aim was to direct everyone who would attend the event, to a place where they could learn more about my research in a fashion which was engaging to them. However, within one week of creating the page, it unexpectedly had over 100 followers, and gained further traction, with 484 followers by the date of the event, with this figure increasing daily. This was a fantastic achievement as it provided me with a unique opportunity to ask the interested public what they wanted to see and learn about (See Appendices 45-51). This engagement changed the form that my public facing research took and adapted the event, as due to a global audience, requests for a live stream increased the possibilities and scope of the event (See Appendices 51 and 52). The live stream was added to further achieve the aim of reaching an interested public, as the venue was restrictive to people outside of the local area. Beyond this, people were requesting quizzes, book reviews and 'did you know' sections, which I followed up on (see Instagram page). This page will be maintained throughout the implementation of the remaining *Hedonistic Histories* events.



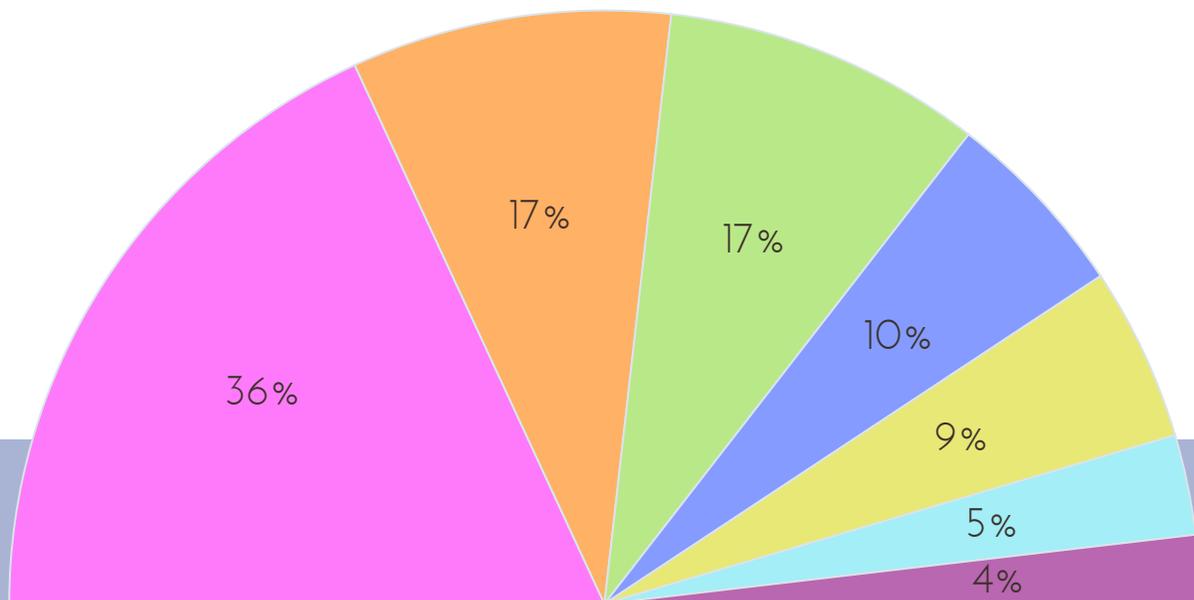
## Budget

The budget was a particularly restrictive element of the project. With a £200 bursary from Newcastle University, a basic set up was possible. GNM had initially agreed to match the amount, and cover an additional £200 charge to keep the event space open late, creating a total budget of £600. At a later date, they said that they could not cover the event space charge, but would still match the original £200, making the total budget £400. By the time the event went ahead, they removed all budgetary commitments, leaving me with the original £200 from the university (refer to Ruth's report for comment on budget restraints). This was a restrictive amount for the plans I had originally drawn up. Ultimately, by reorganising what I had done, compromising on the luxurious feel of the event, and arranging discounts from the suppliers in return for promoting them, and using their logos on promotional materials, I was able to stay close to the budget (See Appendices 19 and 20, and 23-25). I built an excellent rapport with the suppliers, and met with them in person to explain what my event was and to ask for further discounts. This endeavour was successful, and I received an additional 10% reduction in prices from Cavavin and Bangon Print (discussed in person). All suppliers had already arranged to remove VAT previous to me speaking with them (See Appendix 19). Other materials were purchased online due to time constraints. This included the wine glasses and table cloths (See Appendices 54 and 55). Although the wine and prints could have been cheaper if purchased from larger retailers, the museum and I shared an aim to support local businesses where possible in this project. I was pleased that I was able to support local businesses, despite the reduced budget and additional cost that arose from buying from small suppliers; this had the additional benefit of creating positive working relationships that will be maintained for future events.

Had a larger budget been available for the event, professionalism would have been compounded by my initial vision of an authentically luxurious immersive experience. For instance, it would have been preferable to have cotton table cloths, and a fresh glass per type of wine, to emulate fine dining and a wine degustation experienced in illustrious settings. Ultimately, the cuts that were made did not detract from the projects aims, but did prevent the intended indulgent and extravagantly hedonistic atmosphere. An additional budget would also have been worthwhile to improve the live video and sound quality. A small camera and microphone would have a total cost of £200, with the benefit that they are reusable. Since there is increased demand in online and hybrid events as part of the Covid-19 legacy, it would be a worthwhile improvement that could be used for future events. This would accommodate the online audience following feedback on poor sound and video quality, whilst ensuring the legacy of digitising physical events (See Appendix 56).

This graph details how the £200 grant from Newcastle University was allocated for the 'Taxidermy & Tipples' event.

A total of £143 (70%) was spent on products from local suppliers, (Cavavin and Bangon Print), which met the project's aim to support local businesses where possible. The total expenditure was £201.54, which was £1.54 over budget.



## Budget Division

- WINE: £73, FROM CAVAVIN
- LEAFLETS: £35, FROM BANGON PRINT
- POSTCARDS: £35, FROM BANGON PRINT
- VASES: £21, FROM WILKO
- WINE GLASSES: £19.05, FROM DUKES VALLEY AND POUNDLAND
- TABLE CLOTHS: £10.99, FROM AMAZON
- FLOWERS: £7.50, FROM KATHERINE'S FLORIST

# HEDONISTIC HISTORIES EVENT

Free wine tasting!



## Advertising

All of the advertising was undertaken by myself, with support from individuals I contacted (See Appendix 57). Multiple formats were used, including: 150 flyers, social media, and emails. The flyers were placed in locations around Newcastle with consent from the businesses, including multiple pubs, shops and restaurants, and I created QR codes to put on these, which linked the booking page, website, Instagram page and feedback form (See Appendix 58). These were successful with a total of 38 scans from the flyers pre-event, which translated into 21 bookings (there were 41 scans after the event, as people followed the website, social media and 12 people left feedback). When clicking on the QR code, I created a loading screen with the Hedonistic Histories logo, which then had annotated links for the booking page, website, Instagram and feedback form (this has now expired).

The *@hedonistic.histories* Instagram page was very successful in advertising the event, amassing 518 followers, currently reaching 90.3% of accounts that follow the page, and receives 72.8% engagement (See Appendix 59). The page receives frequent amount of story views, and replies, including an individual requesting an extra ticket on the day, and others expressing interest in watching it remotely, hence the additional live stream (individuals in question wanted to remain anonymous, so this is not included in the report but is available upon request). By interacting with other social media accounts, I was able to have my reach expanded as other pages shared my posts and ticket booking link, which increased bookings and the online audience, as many people were located outside of Newcastle (See Appendix 52 and 53, and 60-65). I was also fortunate that Newcastle University have a large reach through their Facebook and Instagram accounts. My event and booking link were shared within the History, Classics, and Archaeology School accounts, on the main university accounts, and sent to all students over email (See Appendices 66-68). In addition to these advertising efforts, I also shared the booking link and advertising graphic that I created in three local Facebook groups (See Appendices 69-72). This received a lot of engagement but did not translate into many bookings, noted by lack of clicks.

The feedback form found that 100% of people found the event through the *@hedonistic.histories* Instagram, Newcastle University email and the university's social media (See Appendix 35). Having GNM publicise the event would have been helpful, but it was still a fantastic turnout and I have every confidence that future events will receive the same, if not more, enthusiasm and audience. This would be reaffirmed if the GNM are able to promote Hedonistic Histories on their social media platforms in future.



## Evaluation

Overall, this project has been a success. Particularly the 'Taxidermy & Tipples' event, which faced multiple challenges, yet remained professional, popular, and a pilot event that I am proud to have produced. The event particularly benefited from the knowledgeable speakers who generously provided their time to help create the event. Mentioned previously in the event section, Annie Tindley, Ruth Sheldon and Anna Robson were invaluable to the professional and educational experience that the audience received.

Whilst each of the outputs benefited from their unique successes and usefulness to the project, the event and its activities were a particularly effective way to engage the public in a research project. Communications and community engagement were appropriately targeted and reached a wide audience; from ticket bookings, to social media engagement, it guaranteed a concrete way of bringing the history to the public, whilst maintaining a personal relationship with the audience, as the attendees continue to feel involved with the project. Online media is a lot less personal than in-person activities, even when receiving successful engagement, hence the demand for future *Hedonistic Histories* events to maintain and improve on the connection made with the public for this research.

All problems faced during the creation of the project, specifically the event, were handled with care and eventually overcome. Time and budget were the greatest challenges faced here, but the end result overcame these problems well, and the event ran smoothly and professionally on the day, receiving only positive feedback, with 100% of the people who completed the feedback stating that they would attend another *Hedonistic Histories* event, and that they also learnt a lot from the project (See Appendix 73). I also received positive feedback from my partner and Senior Management at the GNM, and will be working on a *Hedonistic Histories* segment for the 'Being Human' festival, at their request.

## Conclusion

Hedonistic Histories has performed very well throughout the project, with the Instagram and 'Taxidermy & Tipples' event being particularly successful out of the entire portfolio. By the project's completion, more work than estimated was finished, so the resource page and guest writers for the blog were introduced. Goals for the future and legacy of the *Hedonistic Histories* project have been outlined below:



### Website

Improve on the live streaming quality and host the website privately



### Events

Maintain the existing audience from 'Taxidermy & Tipples' for future events



### Social Media

Keep social media regularly updated to continue engaging the audience



I look forwards to collaborating with more university students who conduct relevant research to *Hedonistic Histories*, and to maintaining relationships with the GNM and suppliers for future events

