



Report to The Hellenic Society - £500 towards the costs of ClassicsFest 2026

Applicant: The Lit & Phil, Newcastle upon Tyne

Project: Reimagining Euripides' Bacchae

This year [ClassicsFest](#) celebrated food and feasting in antiquity. The festival is a collaboration between the Lit & Phil and the School of History, Classics & Archaeology at Newcastle University, produced by Cinzia Hardy. This year's theme of food and feasting in antiquity brought Newcastle to life with three days of theatre, talks, tastings, performance and conversation inspired by the ancient world. [ClassicsFest 2026 round up](#) Across the city, audiences of all ages explored Food & Feasting in Antiquity - discovering how ancient food culture connects to contemporary questions of identity, hospitality and community. From Roman banquets to modern-day migration stories, the festival created space for shared experience, curiosity and conversation.

"What an amazing event - full of rich and stimulating content and not snobby at all."
(writer and journalist Laura Coffey)

Now in its third edition, the festival aims to bring the ancient Greek and Roman worlds to life through the eyes of artists, thinkers and academics of today. This year's theme of food, wine and domestic life included lecture/presentations, debates and discussions with experts in their field, live performances, work with schools and young people, a film screening, guided museum tours, food and cookery demonstrations and a wine event that included a tasting of wines made using ancient grapes and/or methods.

We are grateful for the support of the Hellenic Society which allowed us to mount a 3-part event focussing on Dionysus and the play itself. Preceded by a short presentation by Professor Athanassios Vergados and Dr George Gazis we moved to a semi-staged reading of Euripides' Bacchae, performed by students and volunteer performers. This was then followed by a presentation of the work achieved by the young writers (12 – 16ys) from New Writing North's Open Access Creative Writing Programme, where over 4 preceding sessions they explore one of the play's key themes of transformation. Led by professional writer Kirsten Luckins the young writers considered the mask (as used by the chorus in Greek drama) in the contemporary context of gaming personas and created their own mythological worlds. Following a period of rehearsal and workshops respectively, both these elements were woven into a public event and performed at the festival on Saturday 16th May.

See [ClassicsFest 2026 Highlights](#) The Young people said of their experience:

"Instead of actually re-enacting the play, we've been creating maps. We're making our own gods, characters. We've been thinking about festivals and feasts."

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So there's two sibling gods called Olaeno and Prizal. They fell in love with the same mortal but had a falling out. The mortal killed themselves because they couldn't handle the gods' affections. And so it started a three-century war between the gods, and tribes got involved.

We've been trying to create our own islands, our own worlds. It's been very immersive and very individual. It's good to sort of practice these skills of speaking out in public and just being yourself."

The event was full and attended by people of all ages, including the young peoples' parents. Audience quotes include:

"The play reading was excellent. So much better when acted than just read."

"Really wonderful, so informative, well presented. Different - such a great mix of information, background and interpretation. Loved the young people at the end. Very good. Please keep doing the festival!"

"Enlightening introduction to Dionysus followed by a spirited performance of the play. The young writers' contributions were wonderfully imaginative. Love the wide-ranging programme."

"We came to see our daughter - what an amazing opportunity for her (she is 12). And we learnt something new - very interesting."

Photographs of *Reimagining Euripides' Bacchae* can be found here [ClassicsFest Stills 2026](#)

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Finances

The £500 grant went towards contracting Kirsten Luckins to work with the young writers.

ClassicsFest 2026 was made possible by audiences, artists, academics, volunteers, partners and funders.

We worked in partnership with: Alphabetti Theatre, the Great North Museum: Hancock, The Tyneside Cinema, Blackfriars Cookery School, The North East Refugee Service and Seven Bridges Café (20 project participants), seven New Writing North young writers, Classics for All North 6th form students from 5 schools and seven students of Classics from Newcastle University.

Academic Contributors (9) came from Leicester, Durham, Newcastle, Brunel (London), Adelaide (Australia) and Tübingen (Germany) Universities as well as the director of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London. The Senior Keeper of Archaeology and curator of Arbeia Roman Fort and the Keeper of Archaeology at the GNM: Hancock also took part.

We contracted 3 professional actors, 2 writers, 2 poets, 2 stage directors, 1 festival assistant, 1 photographer/videographer, and one PR/Marketing consultant. Three-16.co.uk provided the staging and all the tech in the main library. In addition, independent bookseller James Routledge of Opt Indie Books had a book stall.

Key non-academic speakers included Sally Grainger and Chris Grocock (Ancient Roman Cookery specialists), Karen Phillips (Linnels Farm, Northumberland), David Harker (Newcastle Wine School), Cook Archie Smith, poet Mymona Bibi and Illisha Purcell, and writer and journalist Laura Coffey.

ClassicsFest was made possible by the generous support of The Community Foundation North East – Newcastle Culture Investment Fund; The David Family Foundation; The Leche Trust; Classics For All North; The Institute of Classical Studies; The Gillian Dickinson Trust; The Roman Society; The Classical Association; The Hellenic Society; Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust; The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Newcastle University and The Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University.