

Showcasing EMOTIVE storytelling about Romans at the Antonine Wall at European Researchers' Night – Explorathon 2017



European Researchers' Night (https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/about/european-researchers-night_en), or Explorathon (<http://www.explorathon.co.uk/>) as it is known across Scotland, has become an established event in researchers' public engagement calendar going from strength to strength across Europe since 2005 when it started, and since 2014 in Scotland. It is funded by the European Commission under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions programme and it is an opportunity for researchers to showcase their work the last Friday in September in a public engagement extravaganza.

The EMOTIVE team spans France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and the UK which gave us the opportunity this year to take part in European Researchers' Night more than once in the same day across Europe. The Glasgow University team jumped at the chance to set up a stall in the [Hunterian Museum](https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/) (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/>), one of the Explorathon venues, in order to let museum visitors be the first to try out the prototype of our EMOTIVE digital story about Ebutius, a Roman centurion who left his mark on the Antonine Wall. Visitors were able to hear Ebutius tell tales of his time in the Roman army stationed in Caledonia while looking for evidence from objects on display that have inspired our research.

Meanwhile, in Athens, our ATHENA research team took the opportunity to show Ebutius' story to Greek visitors to their stall, in a remote demonstration of the same story at the [local European Researchers' Night](http://www.renathens.gr/) (<http://www.renathens.gr/>).



In Glasgow, apart from a range of adult visitors visiting our stall and the exhibition and giving us valuable feedback, the Explorathon team and Ruth Fletcher, the Hunterian Student Engagement officer helped us also arrange a visit from a primary school class from Castlemilk in East Glasgow. A group of 27 keen and enthusiastic 11-year-olds accompanied by their two teachers helped test Ebutius's story using the app in the exhibition. Not only that, but they also participated in the story-design process assisting us in the development of a new story about Verecunda, a local slave girl who also lived during that period and whose gravestone is on display.

The Glasgow EMOTIVE team was assisted on the day by Sara Perry from the York team, who travelled north to give us valuable insight about the whole process, and 12 student volunteers from Glasgow University's Museum Studies MSc, who were at least as enthusiastic and keen as the schoolchildren and did an excellent job facilitating the story-design process and evaluating the use of the app.



The Hogwarts-like entrance to the Hunterian Museum and some of the amazing objects on display from the collection of William Hunter (<https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/about/history/>), the museum's founder, were not missed by the pupils who appeared initially awe-struck by the whole experience.



Once settled in the main hall of the museum, we split the class in two groups and asked the first to try out Ebutius's story on the android handsets we had set up, and invited the other half to engage in some creative writing and drawing to test some of our research on writing stories about historical characters, in this case, Verecunda. The groups then swapped over so that everyone could try both experiences.



Judging by the relative silence and engaged concentration from the Ebutius group in the Antonine Wall display and the audible debate and creative buzz from the Verecunda end of the museum, the engagement with both activities from the school group was a great hit! One pupil commented that "I felt like I was there. It was quite strange because it felt like he [Ebutius] was talking to you in real life", reassuring us that we are on the right track with our EMOTIVE research, testing the potential of digital storytelling for bringing history to life and encouraging an empathetic engagement with heritage and the past.

We followed our morning session with an afternoon introducing general museum visitors to "Ebutius's Dilemma". We gave this title to the story we designed together with Breffni O'Malley, from our NOHO partners in Dublin, as we set the scene a few days before the Romans abandon the Antonine Wall to retreat further south, so Ebutius needs to decide if he will follow the army and leave the family he has created with a local Caledonian girl, or if he should become a deserter and stay with his family. This resonated with most of our visitors and encouraged strong emotional responses. A lot of them were keen not only to take part and try the story but also to talk to us about why we had developed it and what they enjoyed about it. They were also eager to share with us what choice they had made for Ebutius's dilemma. A lot of them filled in the feedback postcard we had designed expressing how the story made them feel. Some mentioned that the story made them consider the objects on display differently and pay closer attention to objects that they would have otherwise overlooked. One visitor wrote "I thought this was really good! It broke the glass wall that separates the viewer from the object in a museum. Really interesting!"

The experience helped us identify some glitches with the audio and the navigation of the app, but much fewer than we expected from an early prototype.




Nearly 40 visitors tried out our EMOTIVE digital story in the Antonine Wall display at the Hunterian Museum on that day, providing us with valuable insights from actual visitors about what they enjoyed, didn't like and early formative evaluation that we can feed back into our next steps in the design and evaluation process.







All in all, a very successful event that helped us engage with a variety of our end users and target audience and gave us a lot of ideas for our future work.

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