

Brewing knowledge on Film: Filmmaking as Research in Experimental Archaeology

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ABSTRACT

Drunk? Adventures in 16th Century Brewing is a research-based film produced within the ERC-funded FoodCult project (2019-2025). Developed in collaboration with historians, archaeologists, craftspeople, scientists, and filmmakers, the film follows the reconstruction of a sixteenth-century beer through experimental archaeology. The film was conceived, from the outset of the project, as a mode of inquiry, with filmmaking shaping how the reconstruction was interpreted and communicated. This article examines the film as creative practice research, focusing on three dimensions: radical interdisciplinarity, where cinematic and editorial decisions brought different forms of expertise into dialogue; materiality, where framing and sound design highlighted tools, ingredients, and environments as co-actors in the reconstruction; and embodiment, where the camera conveyed tacit skills, sensory awareness, and affective responses. Audience reception, gathered through questionnaires, Q&A discussions, and teaching contexts (cited as pers. comm.), is considered alongside close analysis of the filmmaking to evaluate the project's dialogical and pedagogical value. We show that filmmaking can operate as a research method in its own right, generating historical insights, facilitating interdisciplinary exchange, and extending the reach of historical inquiry to wider publics.

Keywords: documentary; experimental archaeology; brewing history; material culture; historical reconstruction; early modern brewing; radical interdisciplinarity; filmquiry

Introduction: Brewing History Through Film

Historical knowledge is most often reconstructed through fragmentary traces—texts, artefacts, and images—yet many aspects of past life, such as sensory experience, tacit skills, and embodied practices, remain invisible in these archives (Steedman, 2001; Smith, 2007). To address these gaps, historians have increasingly turned to practice-based approaches that use reconstruction to understand experiential and embodied knowledge (Abbots, 2016; Agnew, 2007; Smith, 2012, 2022; Havard, 2022). Food history has been at the forefront of this turn, demonstrating how recreating practices of production and consumption can reveal material and sensory dimensions of diets, technologies, and everyday life that are rarely understood through written or visual sources (Havard, 2022).

The European Research Council's FoodCult project set out to investigate early modern food and drink through archival research, scientific analysis, and experimental reconstruction. As part of this programme, the team developed a collaborative brewing experiment to recreate a sixteenth-century beer through the integration of historical sources, craft knowledge, and brewing science (Flavin et al, 2023). In parallel, the film *Drunk? Adventures in 16th Century Brewing* was designed as a mode of inquiry, extending the scope of the project into sensory, affective, and public domains.

This article places film at the centre of analysis. We combine close reading of the film's production—concept, framing, sequencing, sound design, and editorial decisions—with reception evidence gathered from screenings and teaching contexts (structured questionnaires, Q&A, and informal discussion; cited as pers. comm.). Together, these approaches allow us to assess filmmaking both as a process of inquiry and as a dialogical tool—in the production process, where filmmakers engaged directly with historians, craftspeople, scientists, and archaeologists, and in its reception and discussion in academic, public, and pedagogical settings. This dual perspective highlights its contribution to knowledge production, public engagement, and the methodological development of practice-based history.

Theoretical Framework

This project is best understood through a set of interrelated ideas that treat filmmaking not just as a way of representing history but as a way of doing historical research. The perspectives outlined here did not formally guide the making of the film. Rather, they give us a way to reflect on how filmmaking worked inside the project—structuring collaboration, shaping encounters with craftspeople, materials, and making embodied knowledge visible. They can be grouped into four connected areas, each of which informs the themes we explore.

Collaboration and material agency.

Grant Kester's discussion of "dialogical aesthetics" (2004) is useful for thinking about how meaning can arise through exchange in collaborative practice. While Kester's focus is on people, in our project the dialogue extended to things: tools, ingredients, and environments. To capture that dimension, we also turn to Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter" (2010), which recognises the agency of materials in shaping human–nonhuman relations. Read together, these perspectives help us see brewing vessels, grains, and spaces as active participants in the reconstruction, shaping both the process and the way it was filmed.

Embodiment and enaction.

Robin Nelson describes "enactive perception" in the context of practice-as-research, where knowledge is generated through doing and can be articulated in the process (2013). He adapts this term from wider work on embodied cognition, and we use his account to reflect on how both brewers and filmmakers learned through bodily negotiation of elements like heat, rhythm, and constraint. Filmmaking here was not just observation but a way of knowing. This echoes Tim Ingold's idea of "making-as-knowing" (2013), where interaction with materials produces understanding rather than merely illustrating it. While embodiment inevitably intersects with the film's sensory and affective dimensions, our concern here is with how bodily engagement generated

knowledge within the production process, rather than with how sensory experience was mediated for audiences.

Sensory and affective engagement.

To make sense of how the filmmaker's worked with texture, sound, and atmosphere, we draw on Laura Marks's concept of "haptic visuality" (2000), David MacDougall's reflections on cinema and embodied knowledge (2006), and Sarah Pink's approach to sensory ethnography (2015). These frameworks help explain how close cinematography, layered sound, and attention to gesture invited audiences to experience brewing as more than a visual process, while also reminding us of the limits of representing senses such as smell and taste on screen.

Filmmaking as research.

Finally, we position the project within debates about creative practice as inquiry. Agata Lulkowska's term "filmquiry" (2024) captures our approach directly, treating film as a generator of knowledge rather than as supplementary documentation. This aligns with Brad Haseman's account of "performative research" (2006) and Stella Bruzzi's argument that documentary is best understood as a negotiated encounter (2006). Overall, these perspectives allow us to see both the filmmaking process and the finished film as sites of investigation, not simply as vehicles of representation.

These strands also connect with wider historiographical debates on materiality (Smith & Schmidt, 2008; Gosden & Marshall, 1999), interdisciplinarity (Ingold, 2013; Woodward, 2019), and sensory history (Bourdieu, 1977; Classen, 2012; Ingold, 2000; Paterson, 2007; Smith, 2007). Approaching the film through these lenses allows us to analyse how it contributed to historical knowledge by shaping collaboration, animating materials and working processes, and evoking embodied experience.

Methodology

Our approach combined experimental archaeology with creative practice research. Filmmaking was woven into the brewing reconstruction from the start, shaping how the process was interpreted and communicated. The film was not created as a by-product or record, but as a parallel form of inquiry. To understand its contribution, we worked on two levels: by analysing the filmmaking process itself as practice-based research, and by examining how the completed film was received in academic, public, and teaching contexts.

On the first level, the act of filming brought its own challenges, often intersecting with the demands of historical reconstruction. Scientific and historical integrity had to be balanced with the need to make processes legible on screen, influencing choices of framing, sequencing and editing. At times, kindling a flame, turning malt, or stirring mash were repeated for the camera. While these repetitions arose from practical necessity, they also prompted reflection on questions of immediacy, authenticity, and representation. In the same way, close camerawork drew attention to tacit skills and material textures, treating them as forms of knowledge rather than incidental detail. Technical decisions of this sort became methodological interventions, shaping both the brewing experiment and how it was interpreted.

On the second level, we considered how audiences engaged with the finished film. Screenings took place in a wide range of settings: from crew previews (Eikon, London, 2024) to academic events such as the Affective Artefacts seminar at Manchester University (2023); from public engagement activities including European Researchers' Night (Dublin, 2023) and the Intellectual Forum (Cambridge, 2025) to heritage venues such as the Weald and Downland Museum (Sussex), Newlyn Grist Mill (Pennsylvania, 2023), and Glasnevin Cemetery Museum (Dublin, 2025). The film also became a teaching resource in undergraduate and postgraduate modules at Trinity College Dublin, where it supported discussion of intoxication, practice-based history, and historical recreation. Across these contexts, screenings combined informal discussion and Q&A with structured questionnaires tailored to different audiences. Public questionnaires asked about interdisciplinarity, engagement, and contemporary relevance (for example,

sustainability and heritage), while student versions focused on historiography, method, and practice-based history. Responses—cited here as personal communications (pers. comm.)—provided a counterpoint to informal feedback and helped us assess how the film was understood across diverse contexts.

Taken together, these two strands enabled reflection on the film as a research tool. The filmmaking process itself acted as a mode of inquiry, influencing how the reconstruction was carried out and interpreted, while audience reception added a reflexive dimension, showing how the film's methods and insights resonated beyond the project team. From this basis we set out three guiding research questions:

- *How did filmmaking structure collaboration across historians, archaeologists, craftspeople, scientists, and filmmakers, and how did editorial and cinematic decisions mediate their contributions?*
- *How did filmmaking techniques such as macro cinematography, sound design, and sequencing transform tools, ingredients, and environments into active agents of historical knowledge?*
- *How did filmmaker's capture tacit skills, sensory awareness, and affective responses, and what does this reveal about the methodological possibilities and limits of representing sensory history?*

These questions shape the three themes explored in the analysis that follows: interdisciplinarity, where filmmaking structured collaboration and dialogue across disciplines; materiality, where film techniques highlighted tools, ingredients, and environments as active sources of historical knowledge; and embodiment, where tacit skills, sensory awareness, and affective responses were brought into focus, testing the possibilities and limits of representing sensory history on screen.

Recreating History: Radical Interdisciplinarity through Film

The brewing experiment was initiated by the FoodCult PI and chief brewer, who brought together a team of historians, archaeologists, craftspeople, scientists, and filmmakers.

Each discipline contributed distinct expertise, but what made the collaboration distinctive was that filmmaking itself was conceived as part of the research process rather than a later form of dissemination. This unusual constellation of participants created a methodological space where disciplinary assumptions could be tested against one another. As Joe Moran (2002) observes, academic disagreement often stems from differing ideas about how knowledge is produced, while Jonathan Michaels (2022) highlights how disciplinary silos can prevent insights developed in one field from being recognised in another. The filmmakers through the filmmaking process directly confronted these challenges, acting as a site of encounter where divergent perspectives were connected and made legible both to collaborators and to wider audiences.

As the project unfolded, the filmmaking process itself followed the geographical and chronological arc of the brewing reconstruction. The team moved between distinct sites of expertise: the bere fields of Orkney, where agronomists introduced the historical grain; the hop collection in Kent, where botanists discussed varietal change; the traditional maltings in Warminster; the archives at Trinity College Dublin, where early modern brewing manuscripts were examined; and finally the reconstructed brewhouse at the Weald and Downland Living Museum. Each location carried its own disciplinary culture, methods, and material conditions. Filming these sites in sequence allowed the project to bring agronomy, botany, archaeology, craft practice, historical scholarship, and brewing science into conversation, creating a connective tissue across what might otherwise remain separate disciplinary silos.

Adopting Nelson's practice-as-research framing of "enactive perception" (2013), we understand knowledge here as arising through action. Immersed in the brewing experiment, the filmmaking team absorbed tacit insights into how each discipline operated. Their sequencing, framing, and sound design recorded processes, but also brought practices into relation, so that viewers could see knowledge being made across different registers in real time. Screenings often confirmed this. Students commented (pers. comm.) that seeing historians, scientists, and craftspeople side by side clarified how interdisciplinary history is actively constructed. In this respect the film shares

features of Nichols's "observational mode" (1991), where meaning emerges less from scripted narration than from attention to unfolding interactions.

One particularly illustrative scene takes place in the brewhouse, where the film presents a historic craftsman and re-enactor seated by the fire, explaining how he came to design the brewing tools. Figure 1 shows the notebook he holds open, filled with sketches and calculations. The camera lingers on this page in the film, highlighting the iterative and problem-solving nature of his work. Wider shots situate his reflections against the fire and steaming vessels, emphasising that his practical knowledge was embodied in the equipment at work beside him. This weaving of spoken reflection with visual detail underscored the value of tacit, craft-based knowledge, resonating with Ingold's "making-as-knowing" (2013). For public audiences, this was especially striking: several remarked (pers. comm.) that it challenged their assumption that history belonged only to scholars, demonstrating instead how craft knowledge shaped the reconstruction on equal terms with academic expertise, reflecting the polyvalent and non-hierarchical approach of Kester's dialogical aesthetics (2004) undertaken by the filmmakers.



Figure 1. Pages of notebook (screenshot)

The film also traced the movement between embodied practice and scientific analysis. In one sequence, historians, drawing on early modern brewing manuals, attempt to

estimate water temperature by watching how the water bubbled and reflected light. This is followed by a scientist working in the same reconstructed brewhouse, explaining how yeast revived in the laboratory was now being added to the wort, linking modern science with embodied practice. Later the narrative shifts to the lab itself, where the finished beer is subjected to chemical and microbiological testing, with results discussed alongside a brewing scientist. While this mirrored the natural progression of the project, on screen it revealed the interplay of intuition, craft, and scientific testing. The film presented them as mutually reinforcing, each offering a complementary perspective. Bruzzi's account of documentary as negotiation (2006) is useful here: knowledge emerged not from a single approach, but from the interplay of practices, images and perspectives. Students noted (pers. comm.) that this sequence clarified how sensory judgement and laboratory testing reinforced one another, rather than standing in opposition. Public audiences (e.g. Intellectual Forum, Cambridge, pers.comm), meanwhile, drew connections to contemporary issues of science and sustainability, seeing the film as evidence of how past and present knowledges can work together.

The filmmaking process itself also shaped collaboration. Shooting in historic spaces required adjustments: dim interiors needed additional lighting, and actions such as stirring mash or spreading grain had to be repeated or slowed for the camera. Figure 2 captures one such moment from the film: grain being poured into a mash vat, the motion stilled in close focus so that each husk is visible as it falls. Although the action was staged more than once to capture the texture and rhythm of the movement, the repetition became a methodological intervention, bringing tacit skills and material textures to the fore. Figure 3, a production still, shows the crew filming a stirring sequence inside the reconstructed brewhouse, with the cinematographer, sound recordist and technical assistant working in close quarters alongside brewers.



Figure 2. Grain poured into the mash vat (screenshot)



Figure 3. Stirring the mash (Photography Susan Flavin)

This image visualises what the finished film leaves out: the embedded presence of the filmmakers, negotiating heat, steam, and confined space as active participants in the reconstruction. For craftspeople, repeating an action could feel artificial; for scientists, it risked altering experimental conditions; for filmmakers, it was essential to convey detail and atmosphere. Such negotiations exposed the different assumptions attached to accuracy, authenticity, and representation across disciplines, echoing Bruzzi's argument that documentary is a form of negotiation. In class discussions, students debated the tension between staging and authentic process, recognising the deliberate compromises between historical reconstruction and effective communication (pers. comm.). The presence of the camera had actively shaped the brewing experiment, and the debates at the time of filming and subsequently revealed the values participants—and later viewers—attached to accuracy and representation.

Materiality: Engaging with the Past Through Objects and Environment

In recent years, historians have recognised that understanding history requires more than textual records. It also needs attention to the physical world: the objects, tools, and environments that shaped human experience. Materiality, here, provides a framework for examining how physical things interact with human creativity, shaping both historical processes and their interpretation. Rather than treating objects and tools as lifeless relics, the project highlights their dynamic role, showing how interdisciplinary research can recover the deeper meanings of things. The filmmakers focused on the sensory and relational qualities of brewing materials within their broader landscapes, presenting them as active participants in the brewing process. Their textures, shapes, and interactions with the brewing process captured through intimate framing and close sound recording created a multisensory connection to the past. Bennett (2010) emphasises material agency, arguing that things (both human and non-human, organic and inorganic) possess a kind of vitality or agency. They are not just passive objects. This perspective also aligns historiographical approaches that position material culture at the centre of historical knowledge production (Gosden & Marshall, 1999).

As such, the filmmaking aimed to capture the central role of tools like oak barrels and copper vessels in shaping historic brewing. Figure 4 shows copper ladles and wooden casks in close-up. The tactile grain of oak and the reflective gleam of hammered copper invite viewers to consider the physical properties of these tools and their relationship to the brewing process. These deliberate visual choices draw on Laura Marks's concept of "haptic visuality" (2000), in which images stimulate a sense of touch and material engagement. Atmosphere was equally significant. In Figure 5a, shafts of light fall through the skylight of the reconstructed brewhouse, cutting across the smoke-filled interior. In Figure 5b, the same light plays on the surface of a copper vessel, intensifying its colour and sheen. By lingering on polished copper, textured oak, and shifting light, the filmmakers wanted to convey the functionality and the sensory, affective presence of things. The approach resonates with Kester's "dialogical aesthetics" (2004), where meaning arises through exchange between people, but also between people and things. Materiality is treated as an active force in historical practice, shaping both interpretation and experience.



Figure 4. Copper ladles and wooden casks (screenshot).



Figure 5. (a). Light through the skylight (screenshot). (b). Light on the copper vessel (screenshot)

Brewing, of course, was not only the product of tools and materials but also of embodied labour. The filmmakers strove to capture the intense physical work at various stages of the process which led to corresponding creative labour. In one sequence, the team follows a day at a traditional maltings, where grain is dampened, spread, turned, and ploughed repeatedly to release its sugars. Figure 6 shows the maltster at work, engulfed in a cascade of falling grain, his body moving with and through the material.



Figure 6. Working with the grain in the maltings (screenshot).

This work may be perceived as purely technical, but is in fact deeply embodied, requiring strength, rhythm, and attentiveness. The maltster is later shown moving through the grain as his plough reshapes it, visualising the constant exchange between body and material. This again reflects the notion of “making-as-knowing” (Ingold, 2013), where knowledge arises through active interaction with materials. Cinematography reinforces this relationship: close-ups of gestures and the turning of grain emphasise detail, while tracking shots follow the flow of movement. Sound is also important: the crunch of grain underfoot, the scrape of wooden tools, and the rhythm of exertion form a sonic landscape. Filming under these conditions demanded its own form of physical engagement. The cinematographer and sound recordist moved through the same heat and rhythm as the maltster, working in close quarters with heavy equipment to capture the gestures, textures, and sounds on which the scene depends. Rather than simply documenting a process, the sequence was designed to immerse the viewer in the physical demands of malting. Several students remarked on this scene (pers. comm.),

noting how its focus on bodily rhythm and sound conveyed the physicality of historic labour in ways entirely absent from written descriptions.

The filmmaking aimed to foreground the tacit knowledge of the craftspeople who revived historic brewing practices and to make these interwoven skills legible to viewers. Their mastery of traditional techniques—developed through years of material engagement—provided essential insights into the reconstruction. Figure 7 shows a historic interpreter carving a wooden brewing paddle, his labour illustrating how craft knowledge is embedded both in the body and in tools themselves.



Figure 7. Historic craftsman (Adrian Warrell) carving the wooden paddle (photography Ugne Jurgaityte)

From woodworking to basketry and metalworking, these practices were central to recreating the brewing environment. The woven wilch, a drainage system recreated by a basket maker, is another example. Although the construction process was not filmed, the maker's reflections on adapting traditional basketry techniques to historically appropriate materials offered valuable methodological insight. Her role came alive when the wilch successfully filtered the mash, her evident delight captured on screen as an

affective exchange between maker and material. Intercutting her testimony with shots of the wilch in use positioned the tool not simply as a replica but as a co-actor in the brewing experiment, fully embedded in the equitable dialogical aesthetics (Kester, 2004) that shaped the film's production. The editing process was therefore an essential part of the methodology, constructing the dialogical relationship between human creativity and material culture. Audiences engaged closely with this interplay: academic viewers noted that the sequence revealed tacit skill, while public audiences focused on the craft of basketry and linked willow-working to wider traditions of local industry (pers. comm.).

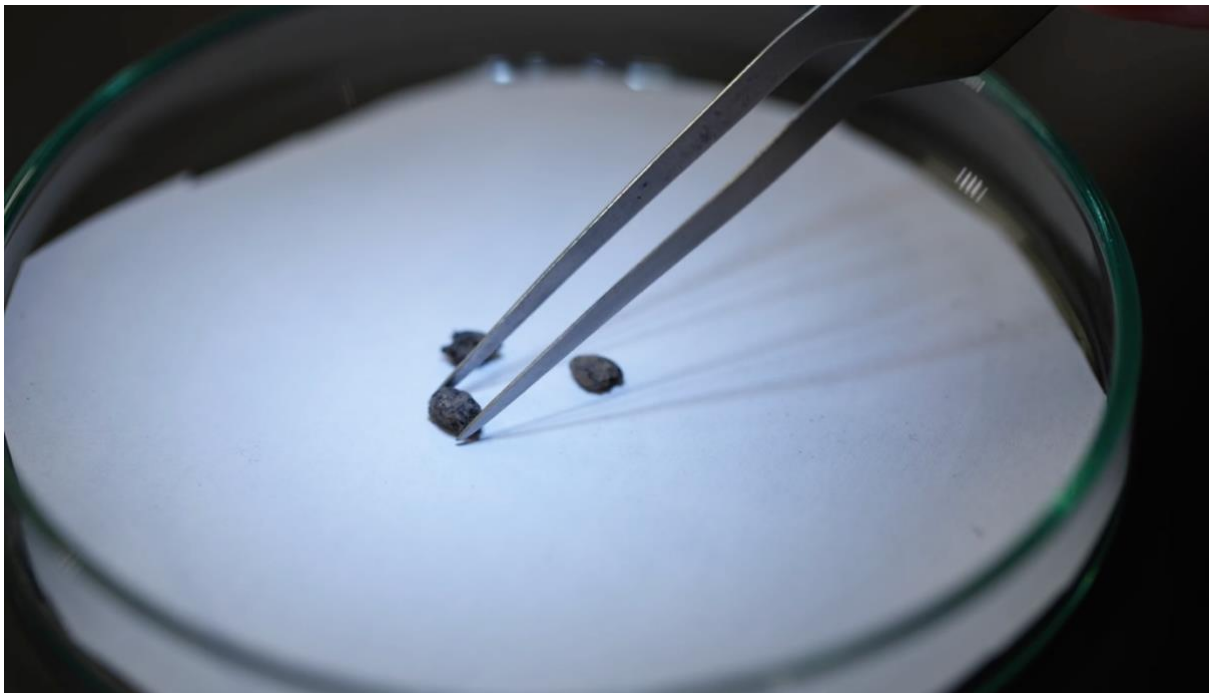


Figure 8. Magnified bere in the archaeology laboratory (screenshot).

The film's attention to materiality extended beyond tools and labour to the environments and ingredients themselves. The sequence begins in the archaeology lab, where seventeenth-century barley is examined under the microscope (Figure 8). The filmmakers focused on microscope close-ups and on the archaeobotanist and presenter in conversation, introducing bere barley—an ancient six-row variety still grown in Scotland—as a historically significant crop. This microscopic scale became the springboard for thinking about how such grains can be understood today. To convey the scale of production and its agricultural context, the sequence moves from the microscope to the expansive Orkney landscape, supported by a soundscape that evokes

the geography and history of the only place where bere is still grown on a significant scale. The juxtaposition shifts from the theoretical speculation to the journey – the investigation. At the Agronomy Institute, researchers explain how the grain is grown and studied. The filmmakers used macro lenses to immerse the audience in the grain itself, while then extending the frame to pull in the wild, tough landscape it grows in. The camera moves between close shots of bere swaying in the wind (Figure 9) and soil crumbling through the agronomist's hands (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Bere in the field (screenshot)



Figure 10. Handling soil in Orkney (screenshot)

Side-by-side images set the robust, varied grains of bere against the pale uniformity of modern barley, offering historical insight as well as a critique of monocultures, and inviting audiences to consider the qualities of the grains across time. This lab-to-Orkney sequence demonstrates how film can position materiality across scales—from the microstructures of a single grain to the sweep of agricultural fields. It also connects the past to contemporary concerns: audiences at public screenings frequently commented (pers. comm.) that these images made them think about sustainability, biodiversity, and the cultural value of heritage grains. Students likewise noted how the juxtaposition of microscope and field scenes “made the past feel close enough to touch” (pers. comm.). By weaving archaeological evidence, environmental context, and present-day agronomy, the film showed bere barley as both a historical object and a living material with ongoing significance.

Finally, filming within reconstructed historic environments highlighted the relationship between space and practice. For example, adjustments to lighting were required in dim interiors. These interventions introduced small departures from historical accuracy but also prompted reflection on the challenges of working in such spaces, underscoring the

interpretive choices inherent in both reconstruction and representation. As the brewer observed during filming, to recreate past processes we must work in the same spaces because “it works one way and not the other.” His comment captured how space itself shapes practice, making some techniques possible and others impractical. Students frequently remarked on this point (pers. comm.), noting that seeing brewing take place in a sixteenth-century kitchen made the material and sensory challenges more tangible, and drew attention to the limits of reconstruction outside authentic environments—reinforcing the wider point that material settings actively shape practice.

Crafting the Sensory Narrative: Embodied Knowledge Through Film

Alongside interdisciplinarity and materiality, the film foregrounded brewing’s sensory dimensions. Through cinematography, sound design, and editing, it evokes how brewing felt, sounded, and even smelled and tasted. By attending to movement, texture, and sound, the film invites viewers into the brewhouse—feeling heat, hearing crackle and hiss, sensing the pungency of the ingredients, and anticipating the taste of the beer. In this way, it bridges academic analysis with lived experience, showing brewing as simultaneously technical, sensory, and affective.

The film engages directly with the challenge of representing senses that cannot be reproduced on screen. In one sequence, the presenter rubs a hop cone and reacts with an immediate, unscripted expression of pungency; in another, she leans into the heat of the fire, her face registering the intensity of the environment. Near the end, the team taste the finished beer. Their expressions—delayed winces as the pronounced bitterness lands—consistently prompt laughter in screenings. What registers is the embodied impact of taste, a reminder that contemporary palates differ from historic ones. Such scenes highlight a familiar problem in sensory history (Classen, 2012; Paterson, 2007): how to evoke smell and taste through mediated forms. The film uses gesture, expression, and affective response to bridge this gap. Students often remarked that these sequences made intangible senses “feel tangible” (pers. comm.), while public viewers commented on how the shared tasting brought the reconstruction to life in an accessible, relatable way.

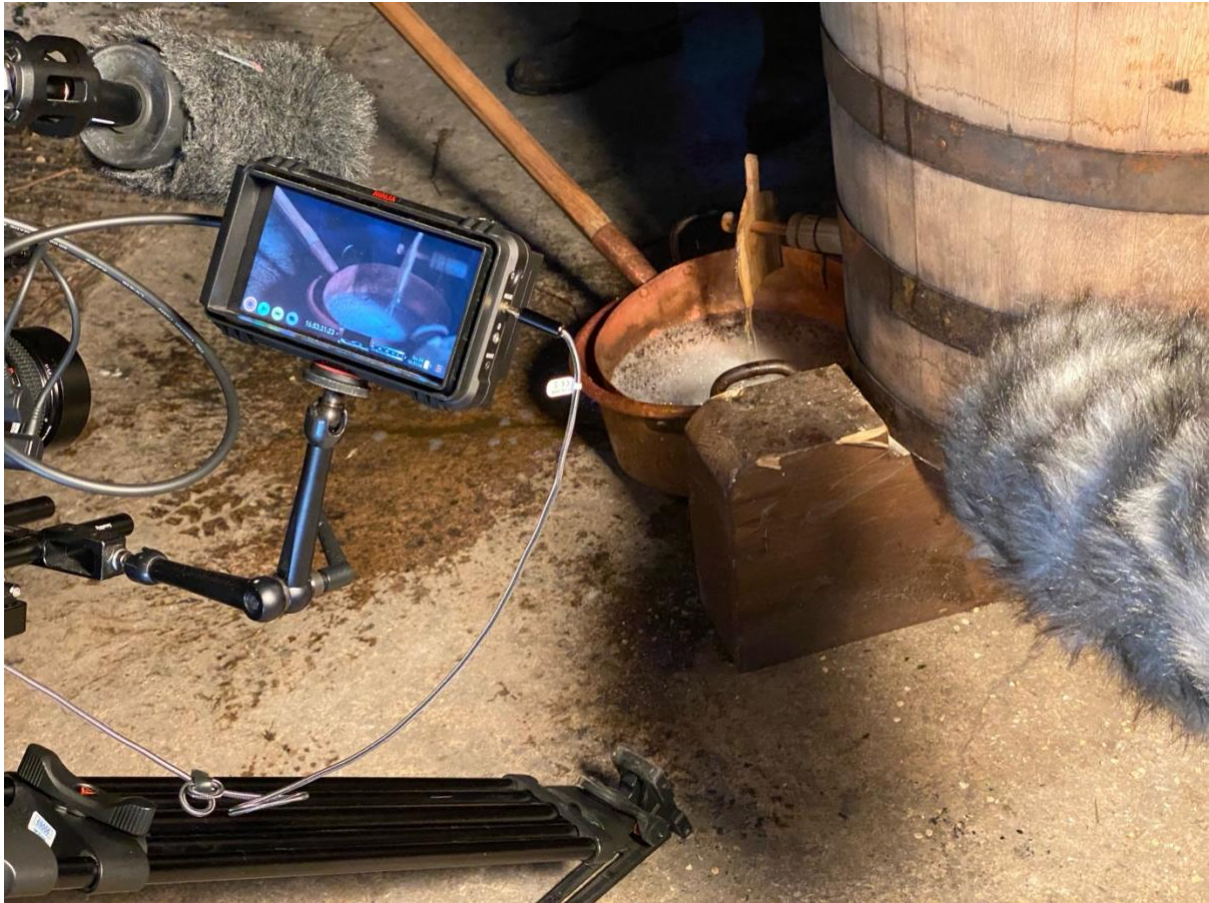


Figure 11. Recording wort draining from the mash tun (viewfinder still) Shreepali Patel

Sound design and music further extended the film's sensory impact. Figure 11, taken through a viewfinder, shows the sound recordist capturing the rush and gurgle of wort draining from the mash tun. These sounds were later layered with others to build a sonic environment that immersed audiences in the brewhouse. This approach again resonates with Marks's concept of "haptic visuality" (2000) and with MacDougall's reflections on embodied knowledge (2006), demonstrating how carefully composed soundscapes can evoke atmosphere beyond what the image alone conveys. Composer Mike Exarchos extended this sensory layering through music, drawing on acoustic instruments such as double bass, harpsichord, mandolin, and bodhrán to create a score that conveyed historical atmosphere while shaping audience affect. He explained that the "woodiness" and resonance of these instruments anchored the music in physicality, supporting shifts from quiet, contemplative workshop scenes to more energetic, communal ones (pers. comm.). Sound and music worked together as method, guiding emotional and sensory engagement.

These sensory encounters were not limited to audiences alone. They were also deeply felt by the crew, whose work placed them within the embodied rhythms of brewing. The cinematographer reflected: “When I watched that brewery scene, I was right back in front of that fire, feeling the heat coming off it” (pers. comm.). Figure 12 shows the crew filming flames under the copper vessel, visually conveying this proximity. His response again illustrates “enactive perception” in practice-as-research (Nelson, 2013): filming was a form of bodily participation in the reconstruction. In this sense, the camera and microphone functioned as active tools of engagement, translating embodied knowledge into shared experience.

Other crew members echoed this sense of immersion. The sound designer recalled how the smell of grain and hops transported him back to childhood on a family farm: “I can watch those pictures and kind of remember how strong the smell was when we were on the farm itself” (pers. comm.). Similarly, the location sound recordist described how capturing Orkney’s ambient sounds revived the sensation of being on the road, with the wind and sea enveloping him (pers. comm.). For the film’s presenter, embodied engagement reshaped her own scholarly perspective. She reflected: “I’ve spent years studying these texts and artefacts, but being there—feeling the heat of the brewhouse, handling the bere, smelling the hops—brought it all to life in a way I could never have imagined.” (pers. comm.). This openness, inviting audiences to learn alongside her, mirrored the ethos of the project as a whole, where history was approached as a journey of discovery. Such reflections again underscore Ingold’s “making-as-knowing” (2013), suggesting that sensory history is not only represented for audiences but also experienced by those producing it.



Figure 12. Filming the flames under the copper vessel (Ugne Jurgaityte).

The actual process of filming added another dimension. Often, shots had to be repeated, reframed, or restaged to capture both detail and atmosphere. One sequence shows the craftsman creating a spark with flint and steel and blowing tinder to flame (Figure 13). The action was filmed multiple times to record the fleeting rhythm of hand and flame, followed by the crackle and glow of the tinder. These repetitions became methodological interventions, highlighting the tension between immediacy and construction. Bruzzi's argument that documentary is always negotiated (2006) is relevant here: the balance between observational spontaneity and staged clarity became part of the film's method.

This layering of immediacy and reflection also shaped how the wider landscape was filmed. Shooting the bere fields on Orkney was as much about registering the movement and sound of grain in the wind as documenting agronomic practice. The filmmakers used slow-motion filming to capture the barley rippling like waves (Figure 14), while the sound of wind and water deepened the sense of place. These choices enabled what we came to think of as an "emotional archaeology"—an approach that surfaces process alongside felt associations. For the filmmakers, these sequences became unexpected sites of personal encounters with the sensory foundations of their craft; for historians, they revealed aspects of practice and place that rarely appear in archives.



Figure 13. Blowing into a flame (screenshot).



Figure 14. Cinematographer filming in the bere field (Shreepali Patel).

By foregrounding wind, light, and movement, the filmmaking process treats landscape as something known through doing and sensing, not only observing—aligning with enactive and multisensory accounts of research practice (Nelson, 2013; Pink, 2015). This perspective tied back to the crew’s responses: just as the cinematographer or sound recordist recalled the heat, smell, and atmosphere of the brewhouse, the Orkney sequences showed how landscape itself can operate as a site of sensory and affective knowledge.

Reflections: Bridging History, Film, and the Viewer

The editing process also unexpectedly extended the collaboration. Historians and filmmakers reviewed rough cuts together, weighing accuracy against aesthetics and affect. These discussions made visible different assumptions about “authenticity”. For historians, fidelity to sources and process sequencing was paramount; for filmmakers, visual clarity and narrative flow. The challenge was to sustain sensory immediacy without flattening complexity. In this sense, the film exemplified Bruzzi’s argument that documentary is always negotiated (2006): never a transparent record, but a mediated encounter shaped by ongoing discussion.

Public reception sometimes confirmed expectations and sometimes surprised us. At screenings, audiences often responded strongly to unscripted human interactions. The maltster’s critique of modern industry, delivered with blunt passion, reliably drew laughter and recognition. Likewise, the closing tasting sequence—where team members sipped the beer and only later registered its bitterness—provoked amusement as much as reflection. What we had approached as records of tacit knowledge and affective encounter were frequently read as moments of personality and humour. That humour grounded the reconstruction in lived experience, revealing how technical accuracy could coexist with warmth and personality.

Structured questionnaires deepened this picture. Public audiences frequently highlighted how the film connected sixteenth-century brewing to contemporary

concerns. The Orkney field sequences, in particular, prompted comments about sustainability, biodiversity, and the fragility of heritage crops. Several noted that they had not expected a film about early modern brewing to resonate so directly with debates about food systems and environmental change. For some, this made the historical material feel newly urgent; for others, it underscored the continuity between past and present challenges.

Student responses, by contrast, often emphasised the film's methodological contributions. They singled out the value of seeing tacit skills, labour, and material interaction unfold on screen, noting how this made questions of embodiment, reconstruction, and authenticity far more tangible. In teaching contexts, the film proved especially productive. The affective elements, particularly those that provoked laughter, encouraged participation: students hesitant to enter theoretical debate engaged readily when discussion began from a humorous or unscripted scene. From there, classes moved to methodological questions—what counts as evidence on screen, where staging helps or hinders, and how competing standards of authenticity are negotiated across disciplines. Seeing experimental archaeology in practice gave students a concrete basis from which to debate larger historiographical issues, echoing the film's own negotiation between immediacy and analysis.

For us as co-authors, writing this article became another stage of that dialogue. We approached the project from different vantage points—creative practice and historiography/material culture—but found common ground in shared frameworks. Co-writing required us to revisit decisions made on set and during the editing process, and to treat audience responses as evidence rather than afterthought. In that sense, the dialogical method of the film continued on the page as an evolving inquiry carried through practice, screening, discussion, and reflection.

Conclusion: Redefining Historical Practice Through Creative Collaboration

Drunk? challenges conventional approaches to studying and communicating history. Rather than relying solely on archives and written records, the past is approached through hands-on reconstruction, sensory immersion, and interdisciplinary

collaboration. Viewers are invited into historical spaces to experience early modern brewing as physical, hands-on labour. This approach expands both the scope of historical research and the role of creative practice in producing and sharing knowledge.

A distinctive contribution of the project lies in its integration of filmmaking as a research method. The film operated as a parallel research practice. Cinematic choices—framing, pacing, sound design, editing—were methodological interventions that surfaced tacit skills, sensory judgements, and embodied practices that text alone cannot capture. In this respect, the project demonstrates how creative practice can operate as research-through-making, widening the historian's methodological toolkit and opening questions that emerge only through practice.

Collaboration was central to this redefinition of historical practice. Historians, archaeologists, craftspeople, scientists, and filmmakers worked side by side, giving equal space to different ways of knowing. Tacit craft knowledge, embodied historical practice, scientific testing, and historiographical analysis were brought into the same investigative frame. Constraint and compromise also proved productive: repeating actions for the camera or adjusting light in dark interiors became opportunities to reflect on how reconstruction is mediated. *Drunk?* showed that “authenticity” is not a fixed standard, but a balance between what the sources allow and what can be shown.

Audience responses were telling. Public audiences drew connections between early modern brewing and contemporary concerns—sustainability, biodiversity, heritage—while students used the film as a way into debates about embodiment, authenticity, and reconstruction as method. For both groups, what carried weight was accuracy joined to immediacy and human warmth. These responses suggest that film can extend historical inquiry beyond specialist circles, prompting critical reflection while remaining accessible and engaging.

Several directions follow from this case. Filmmaking should be embedded from the outset as an investigative tool, with creative and scholarly frameworks developed in tandem. Audience response—whether through questionnaires, discussion, or teaching—should be treated as evidence in its own right, since it reveals how knowledge

circulates across contexts. Negotiations between authenticity and representation should be documented and analysed as part of the research record, rather than treated as incidental compromises. Finally, collaboration should extend through post-production and authorship, ensuring that theoretical interpretation and creative decision-making remain accountable to multiple forms of expertise.

This is a single case study with a finite set of screenings and audience responses. Future work could test and refine this approach across different sites, crafts, and publics, and develop more systematic protocols for capturing and analysing reception.

Drunk? demonstrates that the past is not static or confined to the archive but continually reshaped through embodied engagement and collaborative practice. By adopting film as a mode of inquiry—and by treating uncertainty and negotiation as part of the method—the project offers a model for scholarship that is ambitious in scope yet accessible to diverse audiences. It opens a continuing conversation that draws scholars, practitioners, and viewers into history as something alive, shared, and constantly reimagined.

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