

# Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale, a Storytelling board game

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## ABSTRACT

Games are a well-established technique to promote dialogue, social interaction and engaging experiences. In particular, cards games can support the creation of creative and coherent narratives (Roussou et al., 2015). Based on famous storytelling board games such as *Once upon a time and Tell-a-tale*, we developed *Tell-a-Dryham-Tale*, a card game, to investigate the potential of games as a tool for the collaborative creation of narratives for Dyrham Park, a 17th Century National Trust heritage site in the UK. We ran a series of game sessions, which revealed visitors preference for particular historical information and stories. This data is informing the narrative of a subsequent Augmented Reality (AR) interactive experience that is in development.

## Keywords

Board game, storytelling, Dyrham, historic, cards, AR, augmented reality

## TELL-A-DYRHAM-TALE

In collaboration with the National Trust (NT), we are designing a new Augmented Reality (AR) experience for visitors to Dyrham Park, a late 17th Century country house in an ancient deer park, located between Bristol and Bath. The AR interactive experience will be focused on 'Blathwayt's bookcase', a very important piece that is displayed in the Great Hall of Dyrham Mansion. The curator of Dyrham Park provided information connected with the bookcase, such as when the bookcase was made and who designed it. Then, instead of adopting the usual approach of the curator selecting which information to present and which narrative to tell, we decided to involve ordinary visitors to Dyrham Park in the co-creation of narratives. Since the use of card games to provide themes and segments of information appears particularly effective in supporting creative and coherent narratives (Roussou et al., 2015), we designed *Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale*, a storytelling game.

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As in other storytelling games such as *Once upon a time* and *Tell-a-tale*, players needed to tell a good story in order to win.

In particular, *Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale* is organized in three phases: (1) The auction phase in which players could buy cards using game coins. Each card represented for example characters, places and items connected with the bookcase and Dyrham Park. (2) The tale phase in which players use the set of cards obtained from the previous phase to tell a story. Each player tells the story in any order. Once a player has used all his/her cards, his/her turn is finished and passed to the next storyteller, and so on. (3) The voting phase in which players voted for the best story. Players voted by giving their winning tile to the player who, in their opinion, told the best story.

We designed 32 cards in total from which the players could chose for telling their stories. Through the cards we provided historically accurate information as content and stimuli to inform the creation of stories by visitors to Dyrham Park. In particular, the cards showed historical information related to the owner of the mansion and his bookcase. One side of the card showed pictorial information while the back presented a related textual description. Both sides of each card showed its title, number and colour code. For instance, card number 1 portrayed William Blathwayt, owner of Dyrham Park and commissioner of the bookcase. The front of the card showed a portrait of Blathwayt, while the back briefly described who he was. The game also involved winning tiles and two types of coins, silver coins that had a value of 1 and gold coins that had a value of 5.

Through the game, we were particularly interested in which cards, and therefore which bits of information, visitors considered valuable for telling a good story. Thus, we tested *Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale* with random visitors at Dyrham Park. Players were free to tell any kind of story, either historically accurate or fictional, as long as they used the cards as elements of the plot. In this way, we gave a degree of freedom to the players and we gained interesting insights about which kinds of stories and content they find more engaging. We also tested the game with museum professionals. We looked at which kind of stories they created and gained useful feedbacks regarding *Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale* as a tool for the creation of historical narratives. Finally, the presentation of the game activity appears to be the biggest motivator for participants (Lieberoth, 2014). Thus, we would like to demonstrate our board game with game designers and researchers of the games field in order to get their feedbacks about *Tell-A-Dyrham-Tale* as a game experience.

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