



PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ClassicsFest 2026: Food & Feasting in Antiquity - A Three-Day Festival Exploring Food, Wine and Hospitality in the Ancient World

Thursday 14 to Saturday 16 May 2026

ClassicsFest 2026: Food & Feasting in Antiquity

A collaboration between the Lit & Phil and the School of History, Classics & Archaeology at Newcastle University

Ancient Roman recipes, wine tasting, theatrical performances and discussions about hospitality are all part of **ClassicsFest 2026: Food & Feasting in Antiquity**, taking place in Newcastle from **Thursday 14 to Saturday 16 May 2026**.

Hosted by the Lit & Phil in collaboration with Newcastle University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology, the festival brings together historians, chefs, writers, performers and academics to explore how food shaped life in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds - from politics and social status to hospitality and everyday domestic life.

Founded by producer and director Cinzia Hardy, ClassicsFest continues its mission to make the ancient world accessible to modern audiences through a lively programme of talks, performances, and discussions.

The 2026 festival focuses on food, wine and domestic life in antiquity. Audiences will discover what the Greeks and Romans ate and drank, how meals were prepared and shared, and how food traditions helped shape communities across the ancient Mediterranean.

As Cinzia Hardy, producer of ClassicsFest, explains:

“Food is one of the most powerful ways to connect with the past. Through cooking, storytelling and shared meals we can experience the ancient world in a vivid and tangible way. ClassicsFest 2026 invites audiences to explore the flavours, rituals and meanings of food in Greek and Roman culture, while also reflecting on how these traditions continue to shape the way we eat and gather today.”

The festival opens on Thursday 14 May with a series of talks exploring the politics and culture of food in the ancient world. **Roman Recipes for Modern Cooks** is a chance to join chef and food historian Sally Grainger as she discusses the recreation of Roman dishes from her new book alongside cookery specialist Karen Phillips and Roman historian Dr Kathryn Tempest. Audience members will also be able to taste dishes inspired by ancient recipes.

On Friday 15 May, the festival turns to the history and culture of wine. **Wine From Antiquity to Now**, chaired by Professor Athanassios Vergados, brings together experts including Dr

Emlyn Dodd, Dr Eva Falaschi, Professor Barry Smith and Dr David Harker to explore how wine was produced and enjoyed in the ancient world, followed by a tasting of wines inspired by classical traditions.

The festival also features theatre, with **Great Granda Apicius**, a new play by Abby Walker, directed by Ed Cole, taking to the stage at Alphabetti Theatre on Friday 15 and Saturday 16 May. Inspired by the famous Roman cookbook attributed to Apicius, this production is the winner of the ClassicsFest 2026 Playwriting Competition.

Events continue throughout Saturday 16 May, offering visitors the chance to make a day of it, with talks, demonstrations, performances and hands-on tastings running from late morning through to early evening. One of the day's highlights is **Trimalchio's Dinner Party** at Tyneside Cinema, a theatrical reimagining of the extravagant banquet described in Roman novel *The Satyricon*. Written by Kirsten Luckins and performed by professional actors, the performance unfolds around the audience as they enjoy afternoon tea, recreating the chaotic atmosphere of one of antiquity's most notorious fictional feasts. Roman historian Dr Kathryn Tempest introduces the original text before the afternoon concludes with a screening of Federico Fellini's 1969 film *Satyricon*.

Across the festival, speakers will explore the wider cultural meaning of food in the ancient world. Topics include the politics of food supply in Rome, the roles of cooks in Greek and Roman society, and the idea of *xenia* - the Greek tradition of hospitality to strangers.

The festival closes with **Food & Hospitality from Antiquity to Today**, a lively discussion with Professor Athanassios Vergados, chef Archie Smith from Seven Bridges Café, anthropologists Professor James Staples and Professor Luke Heslop (co-producers of *The Migration Menu*), and writer Laura Coffey. The event explores the ancient concept of *xenia*, the sacred duty of hospitality, and reflects on how sharing food continues to shape ideas of welcome, belonging and community today. Alongside conversation and audience discussion, guests will enjoy food inspired by the themes of the event.

Festival events take place across several venues in Newcastle, including the Lit & Phil, the Great North Museum: Hancock, the Tyneside Cinema and Alphabetti Theatre.

Kay Easson, Chief Librarian at the Lit & Phil, added:

"ClassicsFest continues to grow as a distinctive cultural event in the North East, bringing together scholarship, creativity and public engagement. This year's focus on food and hospitality offers a great opportunity to explore how everyday practices in the ancient world can still speak to modern audiences."

In the weeks leading up to the festival, the Lit & Phil will host a series of satellite lectures exploring food in classical art, medicine and life on Hadrian's Wall.

Most events at ClassicsFest 2026 are free, with some charged events including tastings, food samples or performances. All events require advance booking.

Tickets can be booked online at www.litandphil.org.uk or via bit.ly/ClassicsFest2026, or by contacting the Lit & Phil on (0191) 232 0192.

ClassicsFest 2026 has been made possible thanks to support from 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, the Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Newcastle University and the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University.

Notes to Editors

ClassicsFest

ClassicsFest is an annual cultural festival in North East England that explores the voices, literature and ideas of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds through the work of contemporary artists, scholars and performers.

Founded by producer and director Cinzia Hardy, the festival is based at the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (the Lit & Phil) and is a collaboration between the Lit & Phil and the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Newcastle University.

ClassicsFest aims to:

- Present the literature, arts and ideas of the ancient Greeks and Romans as interpreted and reimagined by artists and scholars today.
- Give everyone the chance to engage with the classics and the ancient world in ways that are accessible and affordable.

ClassicsFest 2026 – Event Programme

Satellite Lectures

Wednesday 6 May, 6pm

Food and Feasting in Classical Art

With Dr Gail-Nina Anderson, Cultural Historian

An illustrated talk exploring how food and feasting were represented in the ancient world. From Egyptian tomb paintings and Greek vases to Roman mosaics and early Christian murals, discover how art reveals social significance, rituals, and later how portrayals in film helped shape the modern image of lavish Roman banquets.

Cost: Free, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Tuesday 12 May, 6pm

Food and Drink on Hadrian's Wall

With Alexandra Croom FSA, Senior Keeper of Archaeology & Curator of Arbeia Roman Fort

Discover what Roman soldiers ate and drank along Hadrian's Wall. This talk explores the available foods, where supplies came from, and the vessels used to store, cook and serve meals, offering insight into daily life on the empire's northern frontier.

Cost: Free, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Wednesday 13 May, 6pm

Food, Medicine & Aromatics

With Dr Chiara Blanco, Lecturer in Classics

Learn how the Greeks and Romans used food and aromatics for health and wellbeing. This talk explores how ingredients shaped daily life, offering a sensory experience of the aromas and tastes of antiquity.

Cost: Free, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Main Festival Programme

Thursday 14 May, 3pm

Eating, Not Cheating: The Moral Economics of Food in Ancient Rome

With Dr Marta Garcia Morcillo, Lecturer in Ancient History, Newcastle University

Explore how Rome managed food shortages, speculation, and public unrest. Dr Marta Garcia Morcillo examines grain supply politics, the impact of food crises on fairness, and how these ancient issues resonate today.

Cost: Free, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Thursday 14 May, 4.30pm

Cooks, Cookbooks and Recipes in Ancient Greece and Rome

With Dr Christopher Grocock, Head of Classics at Bedales School (2014-2022)

Discover the roles and status of cooks in ancient Greece and Rome. Using surviving texts, including Apicius, this talk explores how recipes shaped culinary culture and the social standing of cooks.

Cost: Free, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Thursday 14 May, 6.30pm

Roman Recipes for Modern Cooks

With Sally Grainger, Chef, Historian and Experimental Archaeologist, Karen Phillips, Cookery Course Leader at Linnels Farm, Northumberland and Dr Kathryn Tempest, Lecturer in Roman History at Leicester University

Sally Grainger brings ancient recipes to life from her new book Roman Recipes for Modern Cooks in conversation with Karen Phillips and Dr Kathryn Tempest. There is also a chance to taste recreated dishes.

Cost: £10, includes food samples, booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Friday 15 May, 2.30pm & 4pm

Greek Wine Vessels & Artefacts – Guided Tours

With Andrew Parkin, Keeper of Archaeology, Great North Museum: Hancock

An expert-led tour of Greek wine vessels and artefacts, exploring how they were used for storing, mixing, and drinking wine. Participants can handle objects and learn how archaeologists interpret ancient drinking customs.

Cost: £5 + booking fee, booking essential

Location: Great North Museum: Hancock

Duration: Approx. 1 hr

To Book: www.northeastmuseums.org.uk/greatnorthmuseum/whats-on/classicsfest-guided-tours

Friday 15 May, 6pm

Wine from Antiquity to Now

Chaired by Prof Athanassios Vergados, Professor of Greek, Newcastle University

Explore wine from Roman times to today, including production methods, additives, and health beliefs. Guests will be able to taste wines inspired by classical traditions, guided by experts. Panellists: Dr Emlyn Dodd from Adelaide University; Dr Eva Falaschi from University of Tübingen, Professor Barry Smith from University of London, and Dr David Harker from Newcastle Wine School.

Cost: £20 (includes wine tasting), booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 2 hrs

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Friday 15 May, 7.30pm

Great Granda Apicius

A new play by Abby Walker, winner of the ClassicsFest 2026 Playwriting Competition, directed by Ed Cole, Alphabetti Theatre

When Josh, Elsie's influencer grandson, comes to her for help with a 'traditional cooking'

video, she decides to have a bit of fun with the situation. Because as far as he's concerned, she might as well have been born in 25BC...

Earlier this year writers from across the North East were invited to create a new play inspired by Apicius, the famous Roman cookbook written nearly 2,000 years ago. This is a staging of the winning submission. Before the performance, there will be a short talk about the cookbook. After the show, there's a Q&A with the creative team

This event is supported by The Leche Trust.

Cost: Pay What You Feel

Location: Alphabetti Theatre

Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs

To Book: www.alphabettitheatre.co.uk/great-granda-apicius

Saturday 16 May, 11am

Garum at the Roman Table

With Sally Grainger, Chef, Historian & Experimental Archaeologist

Learn about garum, the famous Roman fish sauce, its culinary uses, and popularity. The talk includes a live demonstration and tastings of recreated recipes.

Cost: £10 (includes food samples), booking essential

Location: The Lit & Phil

Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs

To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Saturday 16 May, 12.30pm

Trimalchio's Dinner Party

With Kirsten Luckins, Dr Kathryn Tempest and professional actors

Experience a modern take on Trimalchio's banquet from Petronius' Satyricon. Professional actors perform while the audience enjoy afternoon tea. Dr Tempest introduces the original text, and the event ends with a screening of Fellini's 1969 Satyricon. Suitable for 18+.

This event is supported by Classics for All, The Classical Association and The Gillian Dickinson Trust. Participation of state schools is supported by The Roman Society's School Fund.

Cost: £37.50 (includes afternoon tea and film) concessions available, booking essential

Location: Tyneside Cinema

Duration: Performance & afternoon tea, approx. 1 hr 15 mins. Film screening approx. 2 hrs.

To Book: <https://tynesidecinema.co.uk/event/trimalchios-dinner-party-classicsfest-2026/>

Saturday 16 May, 1pm

A Gourmet Journey Through The Odyssey

With Laura Coffey, Author & Journalist

Explore feasting and hospitality in Homer's Odyssey, from Helen of Troy's mind-altering wine to epic banquets. Journalist Laura Coffey shares insights from her Mediterranean travels and her memoir Enchanted Islands, linking Homer's story to real-life locations.

Cost: Free, booking essential
Location: The Lit & Phil
Duration: Approx. 1 hr
To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Saturday 16 May, 3pm

Reimagining Euripides' Bacchae

With Prof Athanassios Vergados, Professor of Greek, Newcastle University, Dr George Gazis, Associate Professor, Durham University & New Writing North Young Writers

Examine Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Dionysus, the god of wine and drama, challenges power and order. The afternoon begins with a presentation by Prof Vergados and Dr Gazis, who present themes and selected readings, alongside creative responses from young writers.

Cost: Free, booking essential
Location: The Lit & Phil
Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs
To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Saturday 16 May, 5pm

Food & Hospitality from Antiquity to Today

With Prof Athanassios Vergados, Professor of Greek, Newcastle University, Chef Archie Smith from Seven Bridges Cafe, Professors James Staples & Luke Heslop, Co-Producers of the Migration Menu, and Laura Coffey, author and journalist.

Explore the ancient Greek idea of *xenia*, or hospitality, and its modern relevance. Scholars, a chef, and a writer discuss how shared meals build relationships and community, accompanied by food tasting.

This event is supported by the Institute of Classical Studies – Henry Brown Trust.

Cost: £10 (includes food), booking essential
Location: The Lit & Phil
Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs
To Book: www.cinziahardy.co.uk/classicsfest2026

Saturday 16 May, 7.30pm

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This event is supported by The Leche Trust.

Cost: Pay What You Feel

Location: Alphabetti Theatre

Duration: Approx. 1.5 hrs

To Book: alphabettitheatre.co.uk/great-granda-apicius

MEDIA CONTACT:

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