

Department	School of Computing
Supervisors	Dr Iain Donald, Dr Hanne Wagner
Project Title	Playing in the Past: Investigating User Experience Design in Historical Games

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Historical Games continue to find critical and commercial success. Game series such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Red Dead Redemption*, *Total War*, and *Civilisation* are amongst the most recognisable forms of popular history. Independent games, such as *This War of Mine*, *My Child Lebensborn*, *Through the Darkest of Times* and *Where the Water Tastes Like Wine*, have proven particularly adept at producing new and interesting ways of presenting history. Over the past decade Historical Game Studies has prospered as a field. Key texts examine how the past is represented and played with (Kapell & Elliot 2013, Chapman 2016, Chapman et al 2017, Hartman et al 2020), perceptions of historical accuracy and authenticity (Coplestone 2017, Lorber & Zimmermann 2020) and the manufacturing of history in and around games (Wright 2023). Design analysis of history has often focused on the content and narrative design. Less attention has been paid to the to the game mechanics and user experience design of historical games.

This project aims to investigate existing game mechanics and user experience techniques to determine good practice and define 'historical game design' beyond narrative design, content creation and the game setting. A core question will expand on recent scholarship (Keogh 2018, Schniz 2021) to consider what is a historical game experience? The project will consider how design practices use, interpret and present historical information through play. Indicative research questions include:

- How do games use archival material in their representation of the past?
 - How are different modes of user experience design utilised to present historical information in games
- What is the most effective mode of 'citation' for players?
 - What makes players engage or ignore evidence?
- How do the game mechanics influence player perceptions of the history?
 - what makes them representative/subversive of history,
- Where does the historical context fit within existing processes for designing and developing games (such as the RITE model Rapid Iterative Testing and Evaluation)
- How do we evaluate historical game UX (history content, fun, usability)
 - How are these best presented to players to establish a game and content as historical

Games research is inherently cross- and inter-disciplinary. It is anticipated that the PhD will undertake a mixed methodological approach utilising a combination of practice-based, quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Prototyping will be influenced by contemporary game approaches, tested with users and iterated on to establish good practice. A wide range of tools and techniques can be employed with consideration of recent developments in artificial intelligence chatbots and text-to-image-generation. This practice-based component will identify new opportunities and challenges for game creators, academics and cultural heritage organisations.

Applications are invited from candidates that have an interest in the research, design, development, and evaluation of a digital experience. Candidates should have good creative design and software development skills, as well as experience in appropriate research methods.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to contact the Supervisor before submitting their applications. Applications should make it clear the project you are applying for and the name of the supervisors.

<p>Academic qualifications A first degree (at least a 2.1) ideally in Game Design, Game Development, Computer Science, HCI, Digital Media and UX Design with a good fundamental knowledge of UX research, design principles and digital games.</p> <p>English language requirement IELTS score must be at least 6.5 (with not less than 6.0 in each of the four components). Other, equivalent qualifications will be accepted. Full details of the University's policy are available online.</p> <p>Essential attributes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of fundamental user experience design and user research methods • Competent in multidisciplinary research, game design or visual communication • Knowledge of history, historical games, games studies • Good written and oral communication skills • Strong motivation, with evidence of independent research skills relevant to the project • Good time management <p>Desirable attributes: Practical experience in game or digital experience design and analysis, practice-based, qualitative and/or quantitative research methods, awareness of game development processes and interest in gaming experiences.</p>	
Indicative Bibliography	<p>Chapman, A. (2016). Digital games as history: How videogames represent the past and offer access to historical practice. Routledge.</p> <p>Chapman, A., Foka, A., and Westin, J. (2017) Introduction: What is historical game studies? <i>Rethinking History</i> 21(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1256638</p> <p>Copplestone, T. J. (2017). But that's not accurate: the differing perceptions of accuracy in cultural-heritage videogames between creators, consumers and critics. <i>Rethinking History</i>, 21(3), 415-438.</p> <p>Hartman, A., Tulloch, R., & Young, H. (2021). Video games as public history: archives, empathy and affinity. <i>Game Studies</i>, 21(4).</p> <p>Kapell, M. W., & Elliott, A. B. (Eds.). (2013). <i>Playing with the past: Digital games and the simulation of history</i>. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.</p> <p>Keogh, B. (2018). <i>A play of bodies: How we perceive videogames</i>. MIT Press.</p> <p>Lorber, M., & Zimmermann, F. (Eds.). (2020). <i>History in Games: Contingencies of an Authentic Past</i> (Vol. 12). Transcript Verlag.</p> <p>Schniz, F. (2021) <i>What is a Videogame Experience? A Peripatetic Acknowledgement of Inner Sentiments in Virtual Worlds</i>. PhD Dissertation, University of Klagenfurt</p> <p>Wright, E. (2022). <i>Rockstar Games and American History: Promotional Materials and the Construction of Authenticity</i>. DeGruyter.</p>
Enquiries	For informal enquiries about this PhD project, please contact Dr Iain Donald i.donald@napier.ac.uk
Web page	https://www.napier.ac.uk/research-and-innovation/research-degrees/application-process

