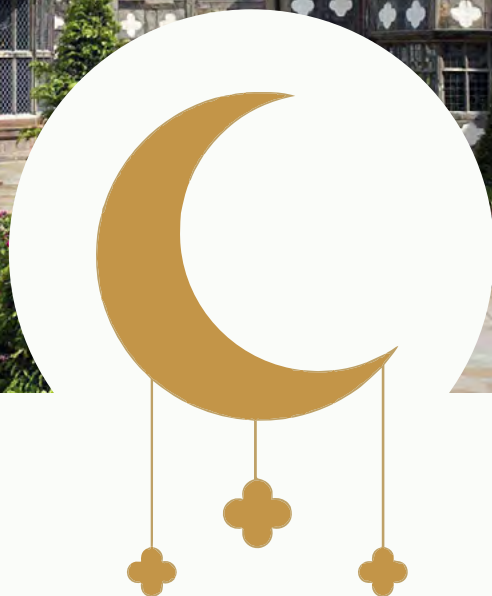




SLEEPING WELL

at Ordsall Hall

Phase One: Wellcome Trust Summary Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Sleeping Well at Ordsall Hall was a public engagement project funded by the Wellcome Trust. It produced a programme of workshops, training and development between October 2022 and September 2024 at Ordsall Hall (part of Salford Community Leisure). The project aimed to create a blueprint for reimagining heritage organisations as sites of engagement around health and wellbeing programming, using Ordsall Hall and its gardens as a case study. The project developed a series of workshops for different audiences, specific to Ordsall Hall and its surroundings. The project team also worked alongside Ordsall Hall staff and volunteers to develop their capacity to use academic research to enrich programming and activity development.

The project used the academic research of the [Sleeping Well in the Early Modern World team at the University of Manchester](#). The research team, led by Professor Sasha Handley, sought to understand how people in the early modern period (c.1500-1750) interacted with their

surroundings to help them sleep well. The project uncovered a culture of sleep care, centred on practices such as plant cultivation, preparing recipes for sleep remedies, and using health promoting bedding materials. This research informed the activities of the Sleeping Well at Ordsall Hall project, identifying important soporific (sleep-promoting) ingredients, recipes, and the people that used them to support sleep.

Over the course of the project 54 free workshops were held at Ordsall Hall for visitors, alongside additional external activities. Overall 1,248 visitors to Ordsall Hall took part in the project activities, and 120 Key Stage 2 (KS2) children from Primrose Hill Primary School in Salford also participated. The project used historical remaking methods to reconstruct recipes from the early modern period, both edible and medicinal, as well as objects such as candles, bedding materials such as flax, and soporific plants like roses. Activity leads, academics, and participants co-created practical knowledge about historical sleep-related practices through experimental history. This produced valuable information about the past which fed back into the Sleeping Well in the Early Modern World academic research.

Key Findings

Lasting change was made to the physical infrastructure of Ordsall Hall and to its public programmes as a result of the project.

- Increased visitor numbers were recorded during the years of the project, and project activities were observed to increase footfall on activity days.
- The project demonstrated how heritage organisations can be reimagined as sites of engagement around health-related programming.

- 75 out of 95 participants said the project made them think differently about Ordsall Hall as a space for health and wellbeing activities.

Participants and staff developed new understandings of early modern sleep care.

- 88% of workshop participants at the Hall increased their knowledge about the relationship between distinct environments, plant-based medicinal recipes, and health and sleep practices in the early modern period.
- Workshop attendees and project staff co-created practical knowledge about early modern recipe making through experimental history and practical activities.

An unanticipated finding of the project was that many participants reported that the workshops and activities had a positive impact on their wellbeing. They valued the social aspect of the sessions, the activities as wellbeing practices, and found that the overall atmosphere of the sessions promoted wellbeing.

Project design

The project involved the following activities:

- The design and delivery of a series of workshops for both adult and family visitors.
- The design and delivery of project-based activities at existing Ordsall events.
- The design and delivery of a series of workshops for school groups at Ordsall Hall.



- The provision of materials for the workshops and legacy materials for Ordsall Hall including an outdoor oven, plants and new interpretation. The garden team produced a new planting scheme for the garden based on the project's research.
- Staff and volunteer training on: specific techniques, using historical sources to underpin workshops, knowledge on historical health practices.
- Downloadable resources including: recipe cards for remaking activities, resources to deliver school-led activities, tested workshop plans for future Ordsall Hall-led activities.

The workshops were designed to follow the seasonal path of the year and make use of the garden and its products when available.

Time of year	Project activities
Candlemas (2nd February)	Light and dark, lighting technologies
February to March	Garden planning for soporific planting and reflective garden space
Easter to May Day	New growth and soporific natural ingredients
April onwards	Dairying for sleep
Midsummer	Potent garden ingredients and processing
Summer holidays	Cooling environments and remedies for sleep
August to October	Preserving
Halloween	Light and night-time anxieties
December	Warming environments for sleep, use of spices and warm herbs

Schools

The project developed a series of five workshops for KS2 children. Primrose Hill Primary School in Salford took part in the piloting of these workshops over two years with two Year 4 classes, Wrens and Housemartins. Workshops were delivered to a total of 120 children across the project. The activities each week were:

Week 1	Butter and cheese making	House and garden tour
Week 2	Rose conserve and syrup making	Bread making
Week 3	Posset making and tasting	Bedding and mattress stuffing
Week 4	Map reading	Garden collages
Week 5	Seed sowing and growing plants at the hall and at school	Sleep poultices and sweet bags

The teachers reported that the sessions demonstrated the value of using heritage locations as learning sites for topics across the curriculum, including for Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education which includes learning on the importance of sleep and time spent outdoors for health and wellbeing, aligning strongly with the focus of the project. Children were encouraged to consider their own sleep and health habits in comparison to those of early modern people. The following specific learning objectives were met by the sessions:

- Art
- History (including Y5 Tudors)
- PSHE ('healthy me' and 'sleep')
- Geography (reading maps)
- Design Technology ('design a healthy meal')

Both classes reported that the outdoor sessions and the more creative sessions were a particular highlight. Children held focus for the planting session, the outdoor gazebo session and the tour around the hall, and remembered the information around exploring the bed as it was hands-on and practical. One teacher shared,

*‘They enjoyed the hands-on learning.
They loved making / creating’.*

Another class teacher reported that the sessions started a good discussion regarding health and wellbeing, and the teachers felt sessions gave all children more confidence to discuss topics in class, as they all had experiences and baseline knowledge to draw on.

Both classes reported that more children had visited Ordsall Hall outside of school since starting the project, and we saw many families with children from Primrose Hill at the Ordsall Hall family sessions during the project.



Evaluation findings

New learning about the past

Participants' perceptions of their involvement in the public workshops at Ordsall were overwhelmingly positive. 88% of surveyed participants identified increased learning on the connections between environments, sleep and health. Even those participants who had a high baseline level of knowledge identified new learning as a result of the sessions,

‘[I knew] quite a bit I thought, very interested in history of environment & medicine / gardens but learned a lot today’.

The creative activities in the sessions were widely appreciated, with participants particularly valuing the practical, hands-on remaking activities. 86% of participants reported that the creative activity was the best part of the workshop. Participants felt that this approach was enjoyable and made learning more accessible, stating that they ‘really learned by doing’.

‘I am very impressed with the opportunity to be ‘hands on’ and try recipes - I felt a connection to the past’.

People particularly felt that remaking enhanced their learning and brought their learning to life, with an appreciation for what remaking contributes to the research process,

‘A lot of the methods and recipes need to be tested as a lot of steps were assumed to be known at the time of writing’.

Many respondents commented on the connections and differences between early modern ideas and current ones, and demonstrated a change in how they viewed the past and historical relationships between sleep and wellbeing,

‘I hadn’t realised that people would have been interested in sleep - I thought it was a modern preoccupation’.

Connection between the house and the gardens

The project created a new connection between Ordsall Hall and its gardens. Plants sown and grown in the garden were harvested for use in workshops. This connection to the outdoors was deeply appreciated by participants,

‘Great to be able to go out to the garden to harvest the ingredients’.

The research from the academic team highlighted the sensory aspects of sleep recipes, and especially the relationship between sleep and smell. The ability of modern audiences to appreciate the sensory aspect of the remaking brought the learning to life and created a physical connection between past and present. One participant shared that their favourite part of the sessions was,

‘Sensory! - & the smells of the rose, nutmeg, liquorice the warmth of the hot tea, sounds of the simmering on the stove, sights of the colours of flowers’.



Changing relationship to Ordsall Hall

75 out of 95 participants said that the session made them think differently about Ordsall Hall as a space for health and wellbeing. Many shared that they had not visited Ordsall Hall before and didn't know that these kinds of activities were on offer.

Improved wellbeing

Many attendees commented on the positive impact that the sessions had on their wellbeing, with some commenting that the sessions were 'relaxing', and others saying the sessions 'calmed me down' and were 'welcoming' with a 'good atmosphere'. Visitors compared the activities to positive wellbeing practices and said that the activities had a positive impact on wellbeing,

‘Yes it is already one of my favourite places and these sessions are making it even more important to me and my wellbeing’.

‘Nice to see history being applied to modern life - great for wellbeing’.

Many participants found the creative learning activities had a clear process, such as 'dipping the candles into the wax and water, the process of building the candle', which increased feelings of wellbeing. Some of the activities recalled more traditional wellbeing practices, such as 'making flowers seems like meditation'.

The social elements of the sessions were also frequently commented on, with the friendly and welcoming atmosphere of the sessions and the opportunity to talk to like-minded people mentioned by participants. People shared that they valued 'the discussions with other participants' and shared it was 'good to chat about herbal remedies'. The opportunity to learn something new, particularly in a low pressure, creative way, was also identified by participants as being beneficial for wellbeing.

The project's success inspired a second phase, which trialled using the remaking workshops as a creative health wellbeing intervention.

Ordsall Hall impact

The project invested in a range of new interpretation, including new displays in the kitchen and garden, wooden furniture for an outdoor learning space, and materials to help support engagement around health, wellbeing and sleep. This included an outdoor oven for recreating early modern recipes like lettuce pie, a wooden butter churn, a cheese press, and historical costumes. It delivered training for staff and found the experience of taking part in the project made significant change to programming, staff skills and knowledge and the profile of Ordsall Hall.

Hub for health and wellbeing programming

Head gardener Jo Green felt that the project has given programming at the Hall ‘a much wider research-based reach’. Staff felt that academic research can be perceived as removed from programming, but the project showed ‘that there can be a direct link between research and hands on activities’. Staff also felt that the project activities ‘have had a lot of impact on the programming at Ordsall. It has made us bolder and more experimental’. The project has resulted in a new ‘menu’ of family and adult sessions that the Ordsall Hall team will be able to use to plan both regular and seasonal programming.

Public Programmes Producer Annie Love identified that the project ‘humanised’ the Hall, by focusing on the very human activity of sleep, it helped to resurrect a vision of the Hall as a home for people who ‘had their own thoughts, approaches and beliefs when it comes to sleep and health’. The project also had the impact of widening engagement with material culture in the Hall through activities such as mattress stuffing, rush light making, etc. The project activities ‘offered a fresh angle to the programming that focuses on smaller, more in-depth sessions, and particularly ones that ask participants to focus on their health’. The

team have found, as a result of the project, that there is ‘a real appetite for more intense, longer term learning opportunities’. Staff enthusiasm was particularly high for new sessions which pushed ‘the boundaries of our programming’ such as using the oven or making historic recipes.

Garden programming

The project brought focus to the garden at Ordsall Hall which has increased the cohesion and authenticity of the interpretation across the house and garden. The garden has been redesigned and extended to promote sleep-related ingredients in a way that is ‘attractive and accessible’. The project incorporated sleep-related ingredients in new planting plans, redesigned an existing bed with meaningful input from children involved in the project, and engaged with considerations on how and why crops would have been grown in the early modern period.

Jo Green valued ‘feeling that our work is underpinned by some serious academic research’. Annie Love noted that staff’s increased knowledge on the relationship between sleep and plants means that ‘those items will definitely always be featured in the garden now’. This supports the long-term sustainability of the project interventions, as the Hall can now continue those sessions indefinitely due to being able to plant and harvest the materials from their own garden at low cost.

School programme at Ordsall Hall

The longstanding schools programme at Ordsall Hall hosts pupils from across the North West of England throughout the year. Sleeping Well content has been incorporated into the pre-existing school visits provided by the Ordsall Hall team, with elements of the research discussed with children in the garden, great hall, bedchamber, and attic spaces. Victoria Howarth, Learning and Engagement Manager, felt that

“The project helped steer the schools programme in a more historically accurate direction. When I started, I felt there was a reluctance to make any changes to the schools offer. Now we centre Saints Days and Festivals as these are days when the House would be opened up to the local community. So, it’s more historically accurate and gives a lovely opportunity for pupils to learn about the customs of the season they are in.’

This change also allows for the introduction of humoral food qualities and the seasonality of humoral dietary practices to be fed into the existing KS2 school visit offer, based on information from the project. This sets the scene for further discussion of food, health, and sleep when the children move on to the bedroom and kitchen spaces.

Décor in the great chamber is also now discussed with children. Information on the importance of colours, imagery, textiles, textures, meanings, and the humoral qualities associated with bedsheets and mattress stuffings has expanded the interpretation provided in the bedchamber. This has been based on training and guidance provided to facilitators on the role of décor and textiles on domestic environments and bodily interactions in interior environments. This training and guidance uses the [research of the Sleeping Well in the Early Modern world team](#).

A servants’ mattress in the attic space now also allows for discussion of the differences between the sleeping environments for the Radclyffe family and for their servants. The mattress was made during the project and is explored with the children alongside sample pillows filled with a range of stuffing materials: feathers, straw, flock, oat chaff, bullrush fluff, and moss.

Staff skillset and knowledge

Ordsall Hall’s staff significantly increased their confidence in delivering new sessions and conveying information on the history of the Hall. The project has resulted in more time being made for staff to take part in research and training, and giving the Ordsall Hall team access to academics has broadened the staff knowledge base. Facilitator Ellie Ashford Hayes found information about finding relevant online sources and interpreting early modern texts to be valuable and that she now feels ‘much more confident doing my own research’. Sarah Eckersley, Facilitator, said the project had connected her with updated scholarship and she would ‘continue to develop these [research] skills now the project has ended’.

Jo Green identified that the project empowered staff to contribute to existing sessions and gave them the skills and confidence to create their own sessions for the future. Facilitators said they felt ‘much more confident’ using remaking approaches, for example since the project the facilitators have identified and analysed further early modern sources to support making bruise salve and poultices using comfrey, plantain, sage and salt. The salves and poultices are now used during the schools sessions.

Profile and network

Jo Green said that Ordsall Hall is now ‘seen as an important hub for creative health’, increasing awareness of this part of the Hall’s offer amongst the wider Salford Community Leisure (SCL) team and Salford Council’s Creative Health activities. The project supported the ongoing work to demonstrate the significant role that museums and heritage sites have to play in health programming, and ‘it’s very helpful for other SCL colleagues to be able to cite a rigorous and impactful project such as this when they are advocating for SCL generally’.



Ordsall Hall

Sleeping Well

For more information about the project please click
or scan the QR codes above for the University of
Manchester website and the Ordsall Hall website.