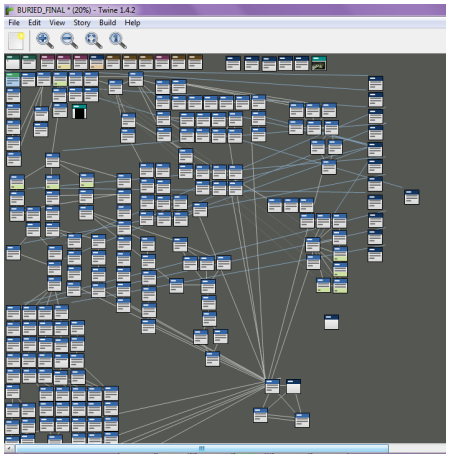
Buried – *An Ergodic Literature Game* - **Paradata**

Image 1: Title Screen of 'Buried'

Buried is a piece of ergodic game literature, a digital take on an analogue literature classic – the chose your own adventure story. It was created in the Twine engine and utilised plain text in conjunction with its digital manipulators to investigate the potentiality of ergodic game literature as a method for exploring complex archaeological concepts. Throughout the course of the narrative the mundane, abstract and personal are overlaid across the physical, academic and thematic, producing multiple scales of impact and providing a multitude of exploration avenues – some incisive and meaningful, others part of everyday minutia. The intended audience was an early academic (eg: first year undergraduate) through to career practitioner with an invested interest in burial in both its archaeological and personal contexts.



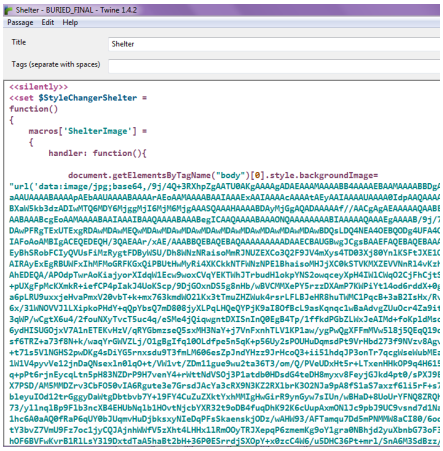
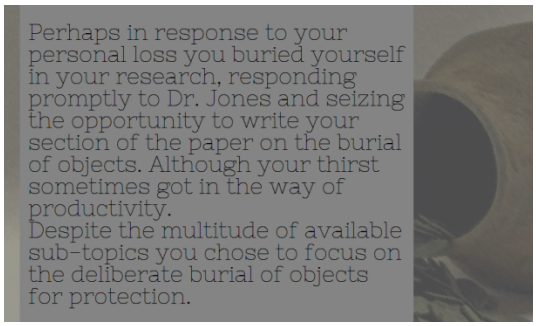


Image 2 (Left): Demonstrating the overview of Buried from within the Twine interface.

Image 3 (Right): Demonstrating how code and text was used to generate complex background images.

The overall goal of the project was to explore the extent to which text (including hyper-text, ascii and text generated images) could be considered a visualisation media, whilst also exploring the impact player agency and choice has on the development, understanding and personal visualisation of a narrative. With the exception of four videos and two fall-back images (are only included so the code has an initial hook) the entirety of the game is created and rendered through text – the in-line and background images being held as text files, as seen in *Image 3* - This design decision was made as a somewhat tongue and cheek observation of the difficult differentiation between "visualisation" and "written word" – a concept that when dealing with digital media becomes tangled, as code, script and plain text are used to create, alter, arrange, call to action and generate the visual media – making visual media intrinsically tied to and in many cases derivative of the written word.

The game was developed to include constrained interaction – meaningful interactions being required to propel the story down one of its many paths, whilst the structure of choice is still determined and enforced by the overall framework of the narrative. This design choice was driven by the desire to demonstrate the potential of a middle ground between the complete freedom of explorative game environments and dictated static interaction in traditional media forms such as paintings, photographs or standard literature. Whilst a middle ground was not entirely met in **Buried** the potential was demonstrated – recursive code and more procedural generation being required to fulfil this desire fully. In the end **Buried** had 17 unique endings and over 50 variations available to any given end-game – an example of which is demonstrated in *Image 4 and 5.*



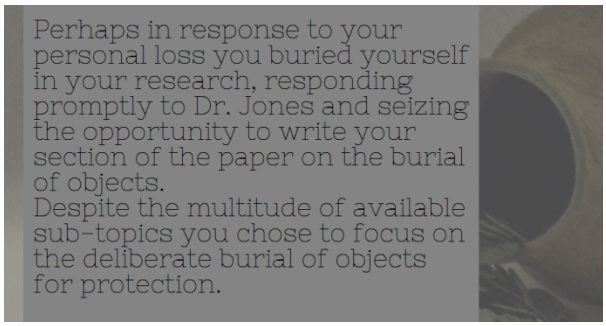


Image 4 (left): Demonstrating one of the multitude of minutia variations to a single given ending. In this instance highlighting the players decision to take breaks from burial research to have drinks.

Image 5 (right): Demonstrating the story epilogue as generated when the player does not stop for constant drinks.

The physical structure of **Buried** is meant to reflect the process of burial – as you progress forward through time and space the thoughts, objects and time that once was becomes harder to perceive, buried and superseded. To achieve this effect the Twine engine output 'Jonah' was significantly altered so that previous passages become unchangeable and greyed out.

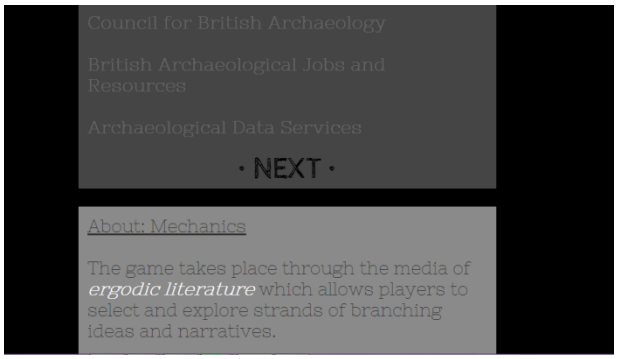


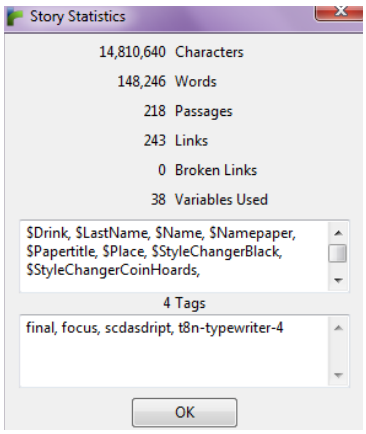
Image 6: Demonstrating the 'burial' of your previous choices.

Buried is a work of fiction – a fact which is indicated at the very start of the game in the prelude. The decision was driven by the desire to allow for personal embodiment and manipulation of the given narrative – something which would have been compromised if a strict grounding in actual data, from a single location was adhered to, given the diversity of narrative choice in **Buried.** Future revisions of **Buried** plan to investigate the opportunity to incorporate complex "if" statements to allow for the inclusion of factual data given any particular locational or temporal choice – time and resource however prohibited the inclusion of this here, and as such the decision to pursue a fictional narrative was made.

Even though **Buried** was a work of fiction there was a desire to base the underlying systems of practices, ideas, debates and objects from the wider archaeological discourse – as such a wide array of archaeological literature was drawn from, although no one particular element was decisively drawn from any one paper or discussion. In the event that a player wished to find out more about the archaeological discipline or pursue an investigation into an object or temporal period a series of links were given on the "About: Fiction" page. An array of dictionary pages are also provided as embedded elements as well as a final dictionary document page (accessible from the "end" screen, which allows the player to read definitions and factual data regarding particular objects, themes or paradigms.

As **Buried** deals with several potentially difficult topics – human death and burial – a trigger warning was included in the beginning sections to warn users that there is the potential they will encounter difficult themes in the journey through any given narrative.

Buried will be hosted on the authors website (www.taracopplestone.co.uk/buried.html) for the foreseeable future, and will be maintained within reason. It is expected that the next base update to the Twine engine will alter the functionality of the game, at which stage it will be archived and a legacy version made available.



All in all, **Buried** has almost 15 million individual characters, 218 individual passages and 243 links – not an insignificant amount. Some of these passages are dedicated to literature review, others to methodological and theoretical debates, others still focus on singular objects or individuals. But even with this incredible diversity the story only just scratches the surface of what falls under the giant umbrella of "burial".

*Image 7 (Left): Story Statistics from **Buried.***

Buried is an incredibly rough and ready proof of concept – complete with spelling errors and poor syntax. Despite this rough exterior it is hoped that something useful can be drawn from its core – a challenge about the division between “visual” and “written”, a contestation of what constitutes a “game”, an exploration of the academic and personal diversity in the term “burial”.

Buried – *An Ergodic Literature Game* – **Screen Shots**

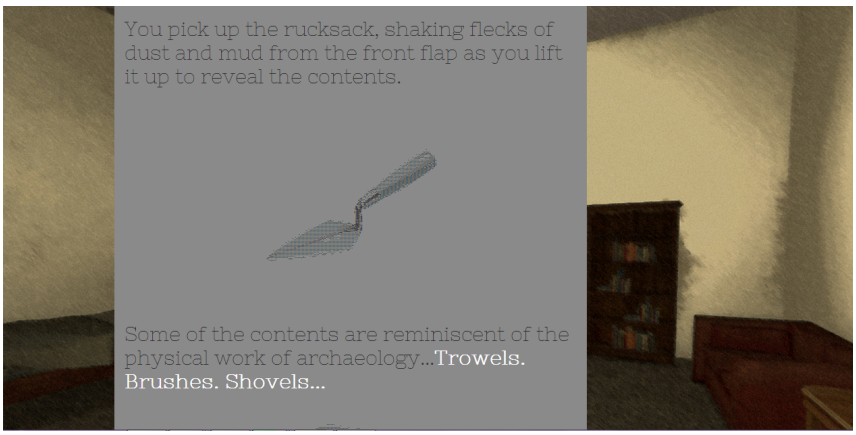


Image 8: Demonstrating one of the many paths through ***Buried*** *which investigate the physical process of excavating buried material – this particular panel showing the ascii-art trowel.*

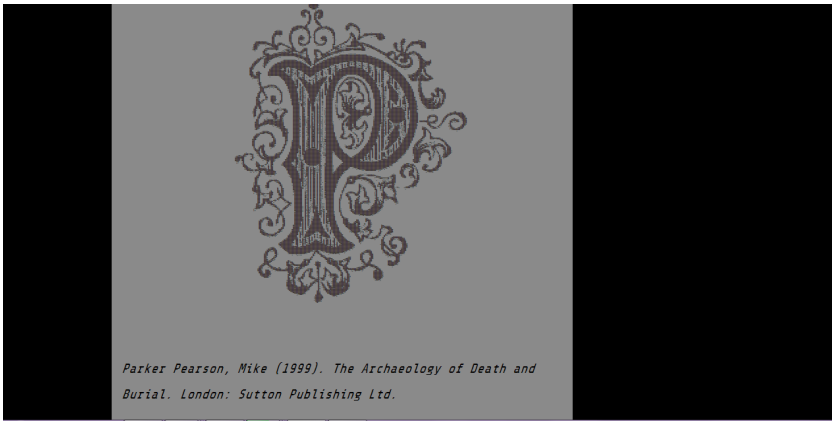


Image 9: Demonstrating the literature review path through ***Buried.*** *Significant works are discussed and their contributions to the understanding of burial in all its forms assessed.*

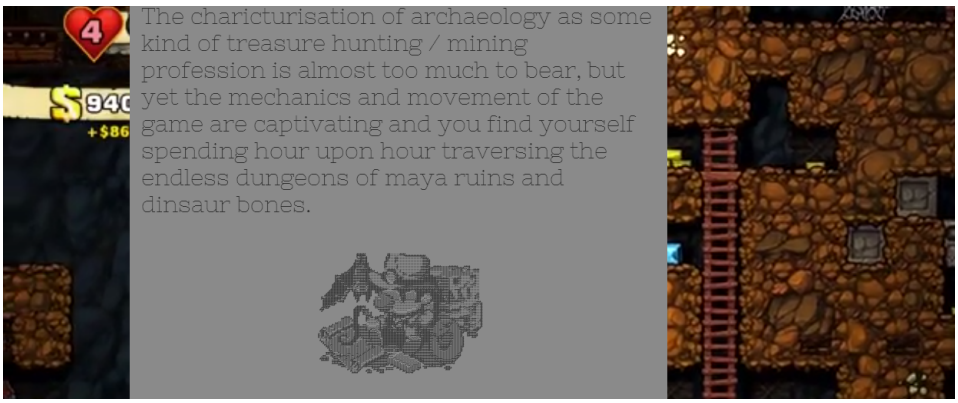


Image 10: Demonstrating one of the digital backgrounds – this one drawing from YouTube to generate the backdrop to the Spelunky game. This passage discusses the use of burial as a game mechanic and the conflicts this has with other archaeological ideas.