

# Unearthing Antiquarians:

Reassessing archaeological practice in rural Australia

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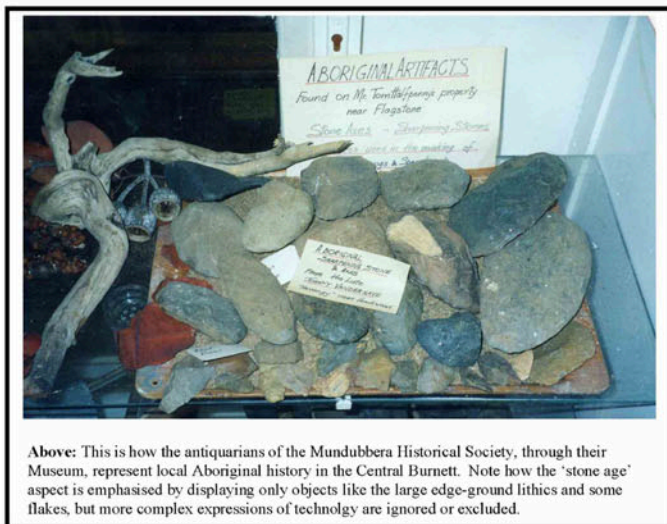
The **objective** of this paper is to illustrate why archaeologists should reassess their theories and methods when working in rural Australia.

A **process** of realisation, reflection and engagement is proposed to achieve this objective.

1. Initially, there is a need to **realise** that within the pastoral landscape (the sheep/cattle properties and associated townships) that dominate rural Australia there are **antiquarians** whose knowledge, collections and guardianship of Aboriginal objects and sites is **considerable & important** (eg: as seen to the right).
2. After acknowledging this, there is a need to **reflect** on the culture and history of such antiquarians.
3. Lastly, the process of realisation and reflection is the basis for archaeologists to **engage** with antiquarians in meaningful dialogue and co-operation.



Above: This plaque was presented to a Central Burnett historian-antiquarian to commemorate his historical authority. Note the stereotypical depictions of flora and fauna, the pioneer themes of bullock drays and barbed-wire, and the passive Aboriginal figure looking backwards.



Above: This is how the antiquarians of the Mundubbera Historical Society, through their Museum, represent local Aboriginal history in the Central Burnett. Note how the 'stone age' aspect is emphasised by displaying only objects like the large edge-ground lithics and some flakes, but more complex expressions of technology are ignored or excluded.

In the course of my paper such historian- antiquarians as **A.S. Kenyon, Percy Trezise & Grahame Walsh** are discussed to illustrate the diversity of antiquarian notions and uses of the Aboriginal material past.

In particular, the case study explores the prevalence of antiquarianism in the **Central Burnett Region, QLD**.

Further research is being conducted on the culture and history of the **Anthropological Society of Queensland** (from 1948 to 1992).

My contention is that antiquarians represent an **ethnographic challenge** to archaeologists.

- In a way reminiscent of archaeologists engaging with Aboriginal people and their cultural approaches to their ancient (prehistoric) and recent (post-contact) material past, a similar **engagement** is needed by archaeologists in relation to the important and diverse manifestations of antiquarianism in Australia.

**Antiquarianism** can be described as both, a **discourse** that a person adopts to understand the Aboriginal material past, and, as **embodied** by a type of person.

1. Such a **distinction** indicates that some people are somewhat amateur in their antiquarianism, adopting it as a discourse, and can be classed as either an **anonymous** or **active** antiquarian.
2. However, some people are so **dedicated** and **authoritative** – in effect, becoming local historians or 'amateur' archaeologists – that their antiquarianism is part of their **identity** (the historian-antiquarian).



Above: An antiquarian 'stone age' display in a front yard near Mundubbera. Note the many stone artefacts (e.g. the blue 'axe heads'), the geological curios, and the central sandstone boulder marked with Aboriginal grinding grooves.