Introduction

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Abstract and Keywords

The Introduction opens with a reconstruction of Aubrey’s first engagement with ancient monuments: his 1649 ‘discovery’ of Avebury. It explains how Aubrey’s interest in the neglected Wiltshire stone circle could qualify him as an antiquary and briefly traces the evolution of antiquarianism in Europe up to Aubrey’s time, including the changing meaning of the word ‘antiquary’ itself. Surveying Aubrey’s life and works it discusses the existing literature concerning them and locates the present work within that tradition as well as outlining its principal arguments. It then outlines the subsequent chapters, explaining the threads connecting Aubrey’s archaeological scholarship to his studies of folklore, his biographies, and his philological manuscripts.

Keywords: antiquarianism, antiquary, archaeological scholarship, folklore, Avebury
The winter of 1648 was cold. After a long, wet summer—the worst in forty years—famine had spread across Scotland and Ireland. Once again the Thames froze as far as London Bridge.¹ Amidst the ice and snow, the Royalist newsbook Mercurius Pragmaticus lamented that Christmas had been ‘turn’d into good Friday’ and Britain enjoyed an uneasy pause between Pride’s Purge in November and the trial of Charles I at the end of January.² Francis Seymour, Baron Seymour of Trowbridge, kept a quiet Christmas at home that year. A moderate Royalist, he had spent much of the decade writing private meditations on the merits of patience and celebrated Christmas 1648 at his country home in Marlborough, Wiltshire.³ In the shadow of ‘the Mount’, Marlborough’s ruined Norman castle, Seymour’s house was a modest Jacobean building which he had built only two decades earlier; an appropriately inconspicuous dwelling place for a man living away from the public eye.⁴ With him that Christmas was his son, the Honourable Charles Seymour, then aged twenty-seven. Charles had attended one meeting of the Royalist Sequestration Committee in 1642, but never supplied the royal cause with money or took arms against Parliament. In 1648 he, like his father, was lying low and waiting for the storm to pass.⁵

(p.2) Subdued though it may have been, Christmas in Marlborough was more than just a family affair. Charles had invited his close friend, a young north Wiltshire squire named John Aubrey, to join them.⁶ Aubrey was a few years younger than Charles, not quite twenty-three, and was fleeing difficult times at home. His education had already been interrupted once by the course of the Civil Wars and, after returning to Trinity College, Oxford, in November 1646 he had ‘enjoyed the greatest felicity’ of his life there for only two years before being called home on Christmas Eve to the bedside of his dying father.⁷ Relations between the young man and his family had always been strained and it is unclear what their reaction was to the prospective heir leaving Richard Aubrey’s deathbed for a house party only a few days after his return home.
The day after Twelfth Night, Charles Seymour met another neighbouring landowner, Sir William Button, to hunt. Button had supported the king, had been raided by parliamentary troops twice, and was, at the time, suffering under a crippling fine as a delinquent, but evidently still lived in sufficient style to keep a pack of hounds. They met at the Grey Wethers on Fyfield Down that 6 January 1649. The young Aubrey joined them and, writing decades later, still vividly remembered the scene. ‘These Downes’, he wrote, ‘looke as if they were sowen with great Stones, very thick, and in a dusky evening, they looke like a flock of Sheep: from whence it takes it’s [sic] name, one might fancy it to have been the Scene, where the Giants fought with huge stones against the Gods.’

The unfortunate fox was flushed and the course of the chase led men and dogs west for two miles until they came to the hamlet of Avebury. Seymour and Button, familiar with the local landscape, took no notice of its unusual situation. Aubrey’s mind, however, was already turning on problems of natural history and natural philosophy and he could not help but be ‘wonderfully surprized at the sight of those vast stones: of which I had never heard before’: the Stone Age megaliths which dominated, and continue to dominate, the village. ‘I left my Company a while’, he recalled, ‘entertaining my selfe with a more delightfull indagation’ of the site. There he saw ‘in the Inclosures some segments of rude circles made with these stones, whence I concluded they had been in the old time complete’. His mental reconstruction of Avebury’s appearance echoed an observation by the philosopher Meric Casaubon which Aubrey would later copy into his notebooks. For Casaubon, one of the remarkable powers of antiquaries was the way in which ‘visible superviving evidences of antiquitie represent unto their minds former times, with as strong an impression, as if they were actually present, and in sight’. It was Aubrey’s first foray into what was to become a familiar way of seeing.
Before Aubrey had time to completely lose himself in the stones, he was ‘cheered by the cry of the Hounds’ and, like any good huntsman, ‘overtooke the company, and went with them to Kynnet, where was a good Hunting dinner provided’. It would be another five years before he began noting down, during another country house visit, ‘philosophicall and antiquarian remarques’ in a pocket notebook he had bought for that purpose, but already—in his fascination with the stones and in his attempt to reason out their original appearance—the young John Aubrey was engaging in an act of antiquarianism, the early modern study of, amongst many other things, the ancient physical past.

Antiquarianism has traditionally been understood to be one of the central disciplines of early modern historical enquiry. But ‘antiquarianism’ was not a concept familiar to early modern scholars. The term is first recorded in English in 1761 and there are no earlier equivalents in any other European language. Instead, the category with which the early moderns were familiar was not the discipline antiquarianism but the person antiquary. ‘Antiquary’, however, was a fluid signifier which changed dramatically over the course of the early modern period. To understand why Aubrey’s fascination with Avebury could define him as an antiquary, it is necessary to go back two centuries earlier and follow the evolution of the word through the thorny paths of humanist erudition.
Antiquary, antiquario, antiquaire, and similar cognates all stemmed from the Latin antiquarius. This was an unusual word, present in only a handful of classical texts, and had originally had connotations of one who intentionally used or misused archaic words and language. At the outset of its journey through the early modern world, antiquarius had no association with the types of non-textual physical artefacts—coins, monuments, archaeological sites—whose study is usually understood to characterize the antiquary. Many early definitions of antiquarius or its vernacular equivalents reflect this sense. Antonio de Nebrija in 1513 glossed antiquarius as a ‘lover of antiquities’, while Robert Estienne in 1531 described an antiquary as one ‘who loves to use antiquated words’, and Andrea Alciati in 1523 noted that ‘antiquarius means one who expounds on ancient words’. The opponent of Erasmus, Étienne Dolet, elaborated on this definition in his compendious Commentarii linguae Latinae of 1536. Recent examples of antiquarii, he wrote, were Filippo Beroaldo, Giovan Battista Pio, Caelius Rhodiginus, and Raffaello Maffei, scholars active at the turn of the sixteenth century who would all now be considered more philologists than antiquaries. Sallust among the ancients and Guillaume Budé amongst the moderns were other examples.
Alongside the definition mapped by Dolet, however, another meaning had been growing. As early as 1464 the Italian humanist Felice Feliciano (1433–1479) could describe himself as an antiquarius when writing of his studies of Roman monuments and inscriptions.\(^{21}\) This meaning came from a redefinition of antiquarius as a student of antiquitates, echoing works of classical antiquarianism, particularly Varro’s monumental *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum libri XLI*. Building upon seminal archaeological and philological studies by early figures including Petrarch, Cyriac of Ancona, and Poggio Bracciolini, Italian scholars of the fifteenth century such as Flavio Biondo and Angelo Poliziano developed the study of antiquitates into a scholarly province in its own right, although the term antiquarius was not yet systematically applied to its practitioners.\(^{22}\) By Dolet’s generation, John Leland in England could style himself ‘antiquarius’ on the basis of his chorographical peregrination of England—a method of scholarly research he had borrowed from Biondo—without fear of misinterpretation.\(^{23}\) In the 1578 *Thesaurus linguae Romanae et Britannicae* the two definitions co-existed, with antiquarius glossed as both ‘men curious in using olde and auncient words’ and ‘a searcher of antiquities, or reader of olde workes’.\(^{24}\) By 1583 the publisher of Johannes Rosinus’s *Romanarum antiquitatum libri decem* could express the hope (p.6) that the study of antiquity would become an *ars* in its own right, reifying as a discipline the practices of the antiquarii.\(^{25}\)
In the early seventeenth century, scholars including Pirro Ligorio, Onufrio Panvinio, Cassiano dal Pozzo, and Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc came to focus on non-textual images and objects as sources in and of themselves. The aftermath of this increasing privileging of visual as well as textual evidence saw the sixteenth century’s secondary definition of ‘antiquary’—a person ‘studious to know ancient things, one that searcheth out antiquities, as of Coins, Monuments, Evidences, or old words’ in the 1664 definition of Francis Gouldman—become the dominant one. The ‘old words’ remained, however, as did an uncertainty concerning the relationship of the antiquary’s ambiguously defined scholarship to its sibling disciplines of history and philology. Francis Bacon and Gerardus Joannes Vossius both distinguished between ‘Perfect Histories’ or historia justa and the study of antiquities, which they saw as ‘history defaced or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time’. Concerns about the antiquary’s relationship to philology were articulated in a less confrontational manner and instead revealed themselves in ambiguities of terminology: even the Greek and Middle English philologist Thomas Gale could be described as a ‘great antiquary’. Throughout much of the seventeenth century, distinctions between the antiquary, the historian, and the philologist remained porous and uncertain, a by-product of the inherent ambiguity of the antiquary’s discipline and scope.

By the end of the century, however, the province of the antiquary was subjected to increasing definition and circumscription as both practitioners and onlookers carved out a tract of learning which stood midway between history and philology. The physical objects of the antiquary’s study were demarcated by scholars such as Jacques Spon, who, in 1685, distinguished the appropriate objects of the antiquary’s investigation as coins, inscriptions, architecture, statues, gems, bas reliefs, manuscripts, and technology. For antiquaries studying the classical world, at least, a recognizable discipline with clear-cut boundaries was coming into being, a discipline which would ultimately contribute to Wolfian Altertumswissenschaft at the end of the following century.
At the same time that classical antiquaries were defining their subjects of study with ever greater precision, antiquarian techniques were being deployed to reshape understandings of the ancient and medieval history of northern Europe. Scholars as diverse as George Hickes in England, Jean-Jacques Chifflet in France, Ole Worm in Denmark, and Olof Rudbeck in Sweden used the tools forged by earlier generations of predominantly classically focused antiquaries to construct interpretations of the histories of non-classical civilizations.\(^{32}\) These scholars, like their predecessors, engaged with the full range of antiquarian subjects, from manuscripts, at the philological end of the spectrum, through the mixed media of coins and inscriptions, to a variety of artefacts, ruins, and sites at the archaeological end of antiquarian research. While engaged in an ongoing dialogue with antiquaries studying the classical world, these scholars built a more methodologically expansive toolbox in their pursuit of the non-classical past, liberally helping themselves to the practices not only of historians and philologists, but of natural philosophers and physicians.\(^{33}\) In Aubrey’s lifetime, a scholar could be described as an antiquary as a result of activities as diverse as editing saints’ lives and excavating prehistoric burial mounds, and could explain his findings with theoretical tools drawn from areas as widely separated as geology and comparative religion.
Is it possible to define an antiquarian text, given the ambiguity and expansiveness of this field of study? Arnaldo Momigliano’s classic 1950 definition stressed the systematic, as opposed to chronological, nature of the antiquarian work; he imagined a classic antiquarian text as being akin to a catalogue of coins, systematic and comprehensive, and contrasted that with the chronological progression of a Livy or a Tacitus. Narrative history, which Momigliano implicitly defined as the normative state of historical scholarship, relied upon this chronological succession of events (p.8) to shape its structure, while antiquarian writing was ‘static’ by virtue of its systematic nature. A corollary of this was that antiquarian writing was descriptive rather than explanatory.34 This interpretation has informed much modern scholarship on antiquarianism but is limited in its explanatory power. Many antiquarian works, including whole subgenres such as historia literaria, were chronological in structure, classic examples being Jean Foy-Vaillant’s 1681 reconstruction of the history of the Seleucid Empire upon numismatic and epigraphic evidence and Anthony Wood’s 1691 biobibliography of Oxford-educated writers and bishops.35 Likewise, while many antiquarian texts were primarily descriptive insofar as they represented catalogues or collections of previously inaccessible data, whether in the form of coins, charters, genealogies, or inscriptions, other antiquarian works focused on the resolution of a particular historical question, for example the contested meaning of an inscription and its larger significance, as in the case of late seventeenth-century Scottish controversies over the so-called ‘Macduff’s Cross’; such texts were inevitably explanatory.36 Rather than seeking to define antiquarianism by these limiting, if not actively pejorative, comparisons with ‘proper’ history, it would be more accurate to define it as the whole length and breadth of historical scholarship, as understood today, which fell outside the rubric of classical narrative history, together with vast tracts which would later be claimed by philology, languages, and the social sciences.37 Antiquaries were scholars of the past in the broadest possible sense and brought with them an impressive range of interests and techniques, some recovered from the scholarly traditions of the ancient world, others invented by its early modern successors.
In England this tradition flourished in the century following the first publication of William Camden’s paradigmatic *Britannia* (1586), a (p. 9) chorography of the British Isles. Imitators of Camden’s particular brand of scholarship produced dozens of chorographically structured county and local antiquarian studies, some of the best known of which, including William Dugdale’s *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (1656) and *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655–73), would define the shape of much British antiquarian scholarship throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Monasticon* was also one of the more spectacular representatives of a post-Reformation tradition of ecclesiastical antiquarianism which mapped the remnants of England’s monasteries and other religious centres, at times with a polemical edge. Meanwhile, the Laudian Church’s promotion of oriental studies led to numerous antiquarian works explicating aspects of the Hebrew and Arabic worlds, often following in the footsteps of the Huguenot scholar Samuel Bochart, whose *Geographia sacra* (1646) informed many syncretist attempts at reconciling ancient Britain with a postdiluvian, Biblical worldview. Nor did the megalithic structures strewn across the British landscape escape attention. As early as 1624 Edmund Bolton had questioned the traditional medieval legends explaining Stonehenge, and by the middle of the century a vigorous scholarly debate had arisen which attempted to site Britain’s prehistoric monuments within a larger European ancient history.
John Aubrey’s first fascination with Avebury belongs to this tradition and he himself was a characteristic practitioner of it. Like many English antiquaries, he came from minor gentry stock, having been born in 1626 at Easton Pierse (now Easton Piercy), a small estate in north Wiltshire. After an isolated, rural childhood, beset with frequent illness, he was sent to the public school at Blandford St Mary, Dorset, though he later credited a neighbouring clergyman, Theophilus Wodenote, with more influence on his education than that provided by any formal schooling. In (p.10) 1641 he matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford, but the growing unrest across England meant that his university education was both patchy and of brief duration. ‘With much adoe’ he convinced his father to let him enter the Middle Temple in London in April 1646 and, although he never made any formal progress towards a legal career, he maintained an association with that society for at least the next ten years. That same summer he became acquainted with ‘many of the kings party’ and subsequently returned to Trinity, before being summoned home, as we have seen at the beginning of this Introduction, by his dying father at the end of 1648.43

This unsettled youth gave way to an early manhood of diverse and vigorous scholarship. Aubrey’s father died in 1652, leaving him what would have been a comfortable estate had it not come already burdened with debt, and the newly independent Aubrey divided his time between Oxford and London, corresponding with university friends like the natural philosophers John Lydall and Francis Potter, making the acquaintance of Samuel Hartlib the intelligencer, and leading expeditions, together with his friends John Hoskins and Stafford Tyndale, to see such novelties as an engine for weaving stockings.44 It was in the vibrant scientific atmosphere of Commonwealth London that Aubrey also began his first major work, a Naturall Historie of Wiltshire, for which he began to collect materials as early as 1656.45 Towards the end of the decade he fell in with the radical political theorist James Harrington, buying a copy of his Oceana in 1658, and attending the meetings of his ‘Rota Club’ in 1659–60, but, as Aubrey later regretfully noted, ‘upon generall Monke’s comeing-in’—that is, the appearance of George Monck, later 1st Duke of Albemarle, and his army in London in February 1660, a turning point which led on to the restoration of Charles II later that year—‘all these aierie models vanished’.46
In the winter of 1662–3 Aubrey, still only a marginal figure in London learned circles, was proposed and admitted to the Royal Society. Thereafter he occupied a distinctive role in the nascent organization, participating in meetings, preserving and encouraging ideas, seeking out the papers of deceased members before they were ‘used to line pies’, and orchestrating the group that attempted to revive and develop John Wilkins’s scheme for a universal language. At the same time, he became increasingly interested in antiquarian subjects. Together with several other members of the Wiltshire landed gentry, he developed a plan for a history of the county in 1660 and in the summer of 1667, on a visit to Oxford, he made the acquaintance of his future collaborator Anthony Wood. Wood, writing much later, recalled with characteristic acerbity how Aubrey, ‘then in a sparkish garb … flung out … all reckonings’, spending lavishly at the pub and generally behaving like a high-living Restoration squire, a portrait which accords well with the image Aubrey projected during this period of being both a gentleman scholar and a patron of the scholarship of others.

This was a front only. His estates continued to be embroiled in lawsuits and the untimely death of his heiress fiancée, Katherine Ryves, in 1657 further complicated his financial situation. By 1661–2 Aubrey was forced to sell his outlying lands in Herefordshire, while a breach of promise suit filed by his second fiancée, Joan Sumner, ultimately led to his complete insolvency in 1671. The house and lands at Easton Pierse were sold and he was left with only crippling debt and a farm at Broad Chalke in southern Wiltshire, apparently the residence of his much younger brother William, with whom he was on increasingly bad terms.
Despite this complete reversal of fortune, which led him in the dark months of 1671–2 to assume a false name and give out misleading accounts of his whereabouts to throw bailiffs off the scent, Aubrey later came to feel that he had ‘never quiett, nor anything of happinesse till divested of all’ and had been lucky to escape the cares of lawsuits and land management.\(^\text{53}\) His friends and vast extended family rallied round with considerable forbearance during his ‘happy delitesency’ (i.e., concealment or seclusion), suggesting occupations—particularly the church, which did not appeal to the anticlerical Aubrey—and offering numerous grants of land in the New World over the ensuing decades.\(^\text{54}\) Aubrey, however, preferred to continue his scholarly activities in the south of England, making ends meet by staying at the houses of his well-wishers and, once his financial situation had somewhat recovered, lodging in London, notably with Robert Hooke in Gresham College. The 1670s and 1680s were decades of almost feverish composition for him as he prepared most of his major works: county histories of Wiltshire and Surrey, tracts on architecture and palaeography, biographies, and numerous texts on archaeological and philological subjects.

As he grew older, Aubrey became increasingly worried that his manuscripts would find their way to the tender mercies of the bookbinder and the pie-man. One consequence of this concern was the friendship he formed in the final decade of his life with the assistant keeper (subsequently keeper) of Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum, Edward Lhuyd. Lhuyd convinced Aubrey to deposit some of his papers, supplemented by various artefacts, coins, and paintings, in the newly founded Ashmolean, corresponded with him on a variety of antiquarian topics until his death in 1697, and ensured that most of the rest of his manuscripts found their way into the same repository afterwards.\(^\text{55}\) Although some members of the younger generation found ‘old Hermetic Aubrey’ eccentric, to say the least, his reputation as a true polymath in the Restoration mould lasted throughout his life and found enduring form in engagement with his theories of British prehistory by the 1695 edition of Camden’s \textit{Britannia} (whose editors included his friends Lhuyd and Thomas Tanner).\(^\text{56}\)
Aubrey was in many ways characteristic of his generation. He combined deep interests in mathematics and experimental science with a programme of antiquarian study and moved between a variety of intellectual and social spheres in London, Oxford, and Wiltshire. His scholarly achievements, however, used the learning of his time in new and sometimes remarkable (p.13) ways. In this volume I have taken a fresh view of his antiquarian scholarship, setting it within its European contexts, and exploring the ways in which its methodologies and content were determined by larger themes in Aubrey’s life and work. His antiquarianism, I propose, can be seen through multiple lenses. Pride in his Welsh heritage predisposed him to a historical narrative which prioritized a Celtic British past, but his conviction that ancient Europe could be understood within a post-Babelic, diffusionist cultural narrative led him to interpret Celtic and Germanic cultures in the light of the Greco-Roman world. He used physical artefacts and sites to argue for new understandings of the ancient world, but later in life came to attach increasing importance to philological and linguistic interpretations of the past. Throughout his career he positioned himself as a node within the larger Republic of Letters, memorializing one province of that Republic in his famous Lives, but in many ways he remained on its margins, limited to Anglophone contacts on the western periphery of Europe and gaining access to Scandinavian scholarship, which he would fruitfully use and transform in his own work, almost by chance. This work has been structured around these tensions and the avenues they offer into understanding Aubrey’s development as an original and notable practitioner of seventeenth-century antiquarian scholarship.
The archive upon which this study is based is Aubrey’s, as it survives in the Bodleian Library, together with a few stray items elsewhere. The Aubrey shelfmarks in the Bodleian include autograph manuscripts of most of his major works, as well as two volumes of correspondence, and some other manuscripts owned but not composed by him.\(^{57}\) When first deposited with Edward Lhuyd the principal manuscripts were bound in dirty vellum covers while the letters and other miscellaneous material appear to have been loose, but all are now bound in uniform late Victorian half-leather. At various points in his life Aubrey also either donated or left in Lhuyd’s keeping a considerable number of books, the rump of his substantial library. These are also preserved in the Bodleian, but not under a single shelfmark.\(^{58}\) However, both books and manuscripts were first housed not in the Bodleian, but in the Ashmolean Museum, where Lhuyd was keeper. They are listed in its early catalogues and were only transferred to the Bodleian, along with the Ashmolean’s other printed collections, in 1860.\(^{59}\) Two important strays are the manuscripts of the *Monumenta Britannica* and the *Remaines of Gentilisme*. The *Monumenta* was in the hands of Aubrey’s potential publisher, Awnsham Churchill, at the former’s death and remained in the possession of Churchill’s descendants until donated to the Bodleian in 1836.\(^{60}\) The *Remaines* was in the possession of White Kennett when Aubrey died. Subsequently it was acquired by the antiquary James West, whose collection was purchased by William Petty, 1st Marquis of Lansdowne, and thus came to rest amongst the other Lansdowne Manuscripts in the British Library when they were purchased in 1807.\(^{61}\)
Even the most polished of Aubrey’s manuscripts are not finished in any conventional sense. Collectively, they represent the sum of his life’s work which he hoped to preserve for posterity but none of his projects—other than a small octavo of *Miscellanies* (1696)—were ever finalized through publication. Even his fair copies came in time to be filled with additions, corrections, cancellations, and tipped in leaves until they appear just as disordered as the roughest of notebook jottings. This presents a problem for any potential interpreter. While I have attempted to recover the development of Aubrey’s thought, it is important to bear in mind that this is not straightforwardly reflected in his manuscripts, which are more chaotic than any study of them might suggest. Likewise, their unfinished status means that assigning a single date to a manuscript is rarely possible; instead, many of the major texts contain materials which span Aubrey’s entire scholarly career.

Finally, it must be kept in mind that we only have what Aubrey wanted us to have. We know from a passing reference in the *Lives* that he carried on a much greater correspondence than survives in the collection which he donated to the Ashmolean. Similarly, Michael Hunter identified a number of manuscripts referenced elsewhere which do not appear to survive. Aubrey’s *Hypothesis ethicorum et scala religionis* would likely have shed light on his treatment of religion in the *Remaines*, while his *Description of the Prospects from Easton-Piers* would have complemented the architectural drawings which survive. Most lamentable, from the point of view of the present work, is the loss of ‘Liber B’, apparently a companion volume to his surviving *Description of Wiltshire*, but more geographically wide-ranging in its antiquarian materials.
As well as recovering the specificities of Aubrey’s antiquarian scholarship, this work will trace the contours of larger themes in the antiquarian tradition across Europe during this period. The seventeenth century was a golden age of antiquarian research—‘the Age of the Antiquaries’ in Momigliano’s phrase—but it remains poorly understood and a closer study of Aubrey and his work can help us to begin recovering the issues, debates, and approaches that defined a much wider field of scholarship. In doing so, it also presents a way of re-evaluating the relationships between antiquarianism, history, and philology, discussed earlier in this Introduction. By paying close attention to the interactions between disciplines in the work of Aubrey and his contemporaries we can reach a better understanding of the development of historical and philological methods and appreciate the polymathic and now surprisingly alien understandings of the past which defined the pre-modern historical disciplines. Aubrey’s work is a microcosm which contains within it these larger, pan-European themes, and a clearer understanding of it can allow us a window onto this still-occluded landscape.
Nonetheless, this volume is also inevitably partial in its focus. I have not attempted to address Aubrey’s mathematical, scientific, or occult interests, nor to engage in a new reconstruction of his biography. These aspects of his life and work have already been well and amply treated elsewhere. Anthony Powell’s 1948 *John Aubrey and His Friends* is a luminous and meticulously researched biography, while Michael Hunter’s 1975 landmark *John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning* remains the standard study of Aubrey’s scholarship as a whole. Hunter’s work covered the entirety of Aubrey’s scholarly interests, devoting its third chapter to ‘the study of antiquities’. This was the first comprehensive examination of Aubrey’s antiquarian manuscripts and remains extremely valuable. In it, Hunter identified issues which will be returned to in the present work: Aubrey’s interest in change, his comparative methodologies, the vividness of his writing, and his emphasis on material ‘collected in the field’, whether records of sites or actual artefacts. He also went beyond the remit of this volume, considering the relationship of Aubrey’s antiquarianism to his study of natural history and the subsequent reception of his works in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning*, however, was an overarching survey and Aubrey’s individual works are each given relatively short shrift. In some instances this resulted in Hunter accusing Aubrey of inconsistency, an uncritical attitude, or (p.16) oversimplification when a closer study of the text in question would have revealed a different story.66 Likewise, while recognizing the key position Roman culture held in Aubrey’s understanding of world history, Hunter dismissed the parallels Aubrey drew between the ancient and modern worlds as an oversimplification of the past or a ‘fusing almost all history together in a single “old time”’.67 These statements were undoubtedly due at least in part to the understanding of English antiquarianism current when the work was published—Hunter built upon the tradition exemplified by D. C. Douglas, J. G. A. Pocock, and others, which privileged politically engaged antiquarian activity at the expense of more culturally focused approaches like Aubrey’s. However, the considerable growth in the study of antiquarianism over the past forty years now encourages a more nuanced interrogation of Aubrey’s works.68 While Hunter’s monograph was a pioneering contribution to the field, there is much more to be said and ample material to be re-examined and reassessed.
Since the publication of Hunter’s monograph there have been four other major contributions to the study of Aubrey’s antiquarianism. First was the chapter in Graham Parry’s 1995 *Trophies of Time*, an important reinterpretation of the place of antiquarianism in seventeenth-century English scholarship. Parry saw Aubrey as occupying a critical place in the larger evolution of English antiquarianism, moving away ‘from documentary evidences to an emphasis on fieldwork’. He also developed Hunter’s theories on Aubrey’s ‘sense of history’, suggesting that he understood it as a series of settled ages punctuated by catastrophic change while also being alert to change within those periods. Some of Parry’s conclusions, however, such as his conviction that Dugdale’s *Antiquities of Warwickshire* was a ‘formative influence’ on Aubrey, derived from his attempt to place Aubrey in a scholarly tradition to which he did not entirely belong, that of Camdenian regional and county history.

Next, a short but incisive discussion of Aubrey appeared in Alain Schnapp’s 1993 *Le conquête du passé* (translated into English in 1996 as *The Discovery of the Past*). Schnapp placed Aubrey within a larger narrative of the evolution of archaeology and thus emphasized different aspects of his work from those focused on by Parry. For Schnapp, Aubrey was a theorizer and systematizer par excellence. Aubrey, he proposed, ‘wished to establish rules of interpretation to govern observation’ and invented a new and powerful tool in his recourse to comparatism in *antiquarian* investigation. In effect, Aubrey was the first theoretical archaeologist. Despite the anachronism of some of these claims, Schnapp’s interpretation placed Aubrey solidly within a pan-European context and drew out some of the more novel aspects of his work which had not been previously explored.
William Poole’s *John Aubrey and the Advancement of Learning*, published in conjunction with the 2010 Bodleian Library exhibition “My wit was always working”: John Aubrey and the Development of Experimental Science’, addressed Aubrey’s studies of megaliths and his methodologies. Poole contextualized Aubrey’s study of Stonehenge within contemporary controversies over its purpose and origin and discussed the aftermath of his interpretations in the work of the eighteenth-century antiquary William Stukeley. He also emphasized the importance of Aubrey’s *Chronologiae*, relating the *Chronologia Graphica* in particular to contemporary continental developments in the study of diplomatic.

Most recently, Kate Bennett’s magisterial edition of the Brief Lives has set a new standard for the editing and interpretation of Aubrey. It is now the definitive guide to the composition of the Lives, but builds upon Bennett’s other work on Aubrey, including articles which have addressed his role in the Royal Society, his bibliographical work, his scholarly practices, and his donations to the Ashmolean Museum, amongst others. Bennett has focused in particular on Aubrey’s habits of collection, composition, and sociability, greatly expanding our understanding of how he went about his work and significantly reinterpreting his relationship with Anthony Wood.

It is hoped, then, that the present work fills a gap in the literature on Aubrey’s antiquarianism. While still attempting a relatively broad survey of his antiquarian writings, it also aims to go deeper and to address in detail several texts—the *Monumenta Britannica*, the Lives, and the *Remaines of Gentilisme*—which have been increasingly recognized as central both to the study of Aubrey and to the study of seventeenth-century antiquarianism. By limiting this work to one thread in a rich and polymathic career—the thread which can ultimately be traced back to Aubrey’s unexpected encounter with the prehistoric past that cold January morning at Avebury—it unpacks the methodologies, contexts, and assumptions of his antiquarian thought.
The first half of the book follows this encounter through to its eventual outcome in Aubrey’s composition of his *Monumenta Britannica*, the first survey of ancient monuments across Britain. Chapter 1 focuses on his study of megaliths and the theories he developed to explain their presence in the landscape, teasing out Aubrey’s reactions to contemporary debates over the origins of Stonehenge as well as the parallels between English and Swedish understandings of prehistoric sites. Chapter 2 considers the remainder of the *Monumenta*, including his investigations of ancient fortifications and other physical relics and the ways in which these altered his understanding of the Roman occupation of Britain. It concludes with a discussion of his unsuccessful attempts to publish his magnum opus and its place in subsequent antiquarian scholarship. Chapter 3 concludes this section by exploring Aubrey’s complex engagement with architecture and architectural theory, from planning a neo-classical country house to creating methodologies for dating medieval buildings to searching for the origins of all subsequent architectures in Babel and its aftermath. Here Aubrey appears at his most characteristically baroque, engaging in innovative but deeply strange comparative strategies to make sense of a global culture he believed to be only a few thousand years old.
While the first half of the work deals with artefacts and sites, the second half deals with texts. Chapter 4 sites Aubrey’s best-known writings, the *Brief Lives*, within antiquarian traditions of *historia literaria* and scholarly memorialization, exploring the ways in which they developed from his collaborations with Anthony Wood and Richard Blackburne. The *Lives* are less *sui generis* than sometimes presented, but instead grew out of a rich humanist tradition of biographical writing which Aubrey infused with an antiquarian awareness of specificity and detail. Chapter 5 returns to the ancient past, but from a new angle, looking at Aubrey’s use of folk custom in his *Remaines of Gentilisme*. Folklore and folk practices, Aubrey believed, provided evidence which linked early modern British culture with that of the Greco-Roman world, but they were vanishing as rapidly as the men and women he had attempted to memorialize in the *Lives*. Aubrey’s syncretist understanding of culture and his reaction to the trauma of the Civil Wars are identified as the twin motivations of this rich and complicated work. Chapter 6 concludes by recovering his studies of linguistics (p.19) and toponyms towards the end of his life and drawing out the relationships between his work in those fields and better-known texts by his younger contemporaries Thomas Gale and Edward Lhuyd. Not traditionally known for his skills as a philologist, Aubrey occupied a central position in a tradition of British philology which was to become an increasingly important way of engaging with the ancient past in the eighteenth century.

Taken as a whole, this volume charts the course of Aubrey’s antiquarian thought throughout his scholarly career, addressing his major works in turn, and reading them as part of a larger fascination with the ancient world and the elusive textures of the past. It identifies his sources, untangles the evolution of his ideas, and sets him within a larger European context of scholarly enquiry which sought to make sense of the world, both ancient and modern, in terms both tantalizingly familiar and dazzlingly strange.

Notes:


(6) The circumstantial details of this Christmas gathering are derived from Aubrey’s later account at Aubrey, *Monumenta*, i. 17–19.

(7) Aubrey, *Lives*, i. 433


(9) Aubrey, *Monumenta*, i. 18.

(10) ‘Indagation’, a searching out or investigation (*OED*, s.v.).


Antonio de Nebrija, *Relectio nona de accentu latino aut latinitate donato quam habuit Salma[n]tice* (Seville, 1513), fol. XII (‘el amador de las antiguedades’); Robert Estienne, *Dictionarium, seu Latinae linguae thesaurus* (Paris, 1531), not paginated (‘qui est curieux de user de mots anciens’); Andrea Alciati, *Paradoxororum ad Pratum libri VI* (Basel, 1523), 217 (‘antiquarius enim significat eum qui antiqua verba interpretatur’).

Étienne Dolet, *Commentariorum linguae Latinae tomus primus* (Lyons, 1536), col. 1342.

Maffei’s *Commentariorum rerum urbanorum libri XXXVIII* (Rome, 1506)

Budé, like the other scholars cited by Dolet, was primarily interested in the study and interpretation of texts, but his *De asse et partibus* (Paris, 1516) was a pioneering study of ancient numismatics. It is unclear, however, whether Dolet intended to highlight this aspect of his work.


*Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae tam accurate congestus* (London, 1578), not paginated.

Johannes Rosinus, *Romanarum antiquitatum libri decem* (Lyons, 1585), sig.](

Miller, ‘Major Trends’, 256.


(29) Francis Drake, Eboracum, or, the History and Antiquities of the City of York (London, 1736), 25.

(30) Jacques Spon, Miscellanea eruditae antiquitatis (Lyons, 1685),


(36) James Cunningham, *An Essay upon the Inscription of Macduff's Cross in Fyfe* (Edinburgh, 1678).

(37) For a comparable ‘wide view’ of antiquarianism see Peter Miller’s definition of it as the study of ‘the entire lived culture of a people or a period’ (‘Major Trends’, 244). Antiquarianism, Miller stresses, ‘intersects with natural history, medicine, and astronomy, as well as oriental languages and literature’ (‘Major Trends’, 245).


(39) Jan Broadway, *William Dugdale and the Significance of County History in Early Stuart England* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1999) ‘No Historie so meete’ *Speculum, passim* *Trophies of Time* *Social Circulation*


(42) See Chapter 1.


(53) Aubrey, *Lives*, i. 435. For Aubrey’s ongoing attempts to convince the authorities that he was abroad see, for example, Bodleian MS Wood F 39, fol. 141r.

(54) These included six hundred acres in Pennsylvania, offered by William Penn himself, and unspecified prospects in Jamaica, held out by Governor John Vaughan (Powell, *Aubrey*, 154, 192–3).

(56) For ‘old Hermetic Aubrey’ see the letter from Robert Salusbury to Edward Lhuyd, probably from January 1697, Bodleian MS Ashmole 1817a, fol. 422r. See Chapter 2 for the use of Aubrey’s ideas in the 1695 Britannia.


(59) Madan et al., Summary Catalogue, v. 81.


(62) Writing of his friend the inventor Francis Potter, Aubrey noted that ‘I have all his letters by me, which are very good, and I believe neer 200’ (Aubrey, Lives, i. 188). Seventeen survive in Bodleian MSS Aubrey 12–13.

(63) Hunter, Aubrey, 239–42.

(64) Hunter, Aubrey, 241–2. Its presumed connection to the Wiltshire manuscript comes from a letter of Aubrey’s to Anthony Wood, dated 17 August 1685, in which he mentions that he has sent to Wood ‘my two Volumes of Antiquities of Wilts A. & B.’ (Bodleian MS Wood F 39, fol. 375r).


(66) See, e.g. Hunter, Aubrey, 186, 189.

(67) Hunter, Aubrey, 186.

(68) For Hunter’s debt to Douglas, Pocock, and others see Aubrey, 148–9.

(69) Parry, Trophies of Time, 275–307.

(70) Parry, Trophies of Time, 277, 296–7.

(71) Parry, Trophies of Time, 277.

(72) Schnapp, Discovery, 188–96.
(73) Schnapp, Discovery, 191.

(74) Schnapp, Discovery, 194.

(75) William Poole, John Aubrey and the Advancement of Learning (Oxford, 2010), 64–76 (megaliths) and 86–9 (historical methods).

(76) Poole, Aubrey, 88–90.

(77) Aubrey, Lives.


(79) It does not, however, claim to address all of Aubrey’s antiquarian texts in detail, in particular leaving aside his county histories of Wiltshire and Surrey and several of his Miscelany Tractates. The Description of the North Division of Wiltshire is now Bodleian MS Aubrey 3, the Perambulation of Surrey is Bodleian MS Aubrey 4, and the Stromata, or Certain Miscelany Tractates is Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fols. 150r–242v. See Hunter, Aubrey, passim, and Parry, Trophies of Time, 277–80.