PRAGMATOLOGY

Things.

And people.


Our modes of existence.

In spite of how central things are to being human, there is no word that encompasses the connection, and certainly no discipline of things.

I suggest

Pragmatology: the theory and practice of *pragmata*

(because I am fascinated by etymology and all things ancient Greek!)

Encompassing the richness of the old Greek meaning of the term, *pragmata* are ‘things’, but also ‘deeds’, ‘acts’ (things done), ‘doings’, ‘circumstances’ (encounters), ‘contested matters’, ‘duties’, or ‘obligations’. The verb at the root of *pragmata* is *prattein* – to act in the material world, engaged with things. This is cognate with making as poetics (the Greek root is *poiein*) – a creative component to practice generally.

As an archaeologist, I emphasize the care that archaeologists, heritage managers, and many others have for pasts-in-the-present – loyalty to *ta archaia* (a root of ‘archaeology’, literally translated as ‘old things’).

Remnants, vestiges, monuments, artifacts hold memories which we attentively piece together following, typically, an aspiration to fidelity and authenticity. Of course, *archaia*, old things, demand a particular orientation, both practical and imaginative. To regard old things of archaeological and heritage interest as *pragmata* reminds us of the primacy of *engaging* with things. And *pragmata* do not stand on their own – they become what they are through our relationships with them.
Engagement comes first, rather than, for example, the material evidence of past event. The past comes to be what it is through our actions upon it, so there is no definitive end to the past. (Memory is not fixed, but is made through acts of recollections; understanding the past depends upon hindsight.) The past lives on in our relationships with what remains, and so there is always more to be said and done. The challenge is to meet things, the past, halfway, in our future-oriented (archaeological) projects to make something of what remains.