

# The Opal Game

**David Oldfield is a South Australian, who some half a century ago made a lifelong commitment to the Opal Game. This is his story...**

"I call it a game and not an industry or business because I view all of life as a game to be enjoyed".

By chance in 1965 I met a man called Emu. He taught me how to spell O-P-A-L. He sold me a 10 x 6 A-grade triplet and I was hooked.

From '65 to '69 I dabbled in lapidary on his machines in Andamooka on the odd weekends I visited him while still involved in agriculture. He would go down to Tucker Box Steve's and do his business of seeking out miners and parcels of opal while I would play with his Gemmasta machines and gems on dop sticks that I found sitting around in pegboards on his benches.

One day on his return he said, "Hey, David you seem to have an eye for cutting, do you want me to teach you? Do you want a job?"

So I became an apprentice to a gentleman called Immo Stein and later became the best man at his wedding to Louise and the rest of that legend can be viewed here: Immo and Louise Stein <http://www.opalsdownunder.com.au/>

I began Opal field Gems [S.A.] in 1972 which grew to be the largest opal cutting factory in the world. By 1984 it was also the largest opal retail company in South Australia.

OPG became a "household word" in the opal game. That seems an enormous "claim to fame" but I wasn't looking for fame and relative to other types of businesses it was small with only 32 staff.

My logos I created and used for many years have been plagiarised, but copyright is a crime in itself. Using someone else's creation can be an act of abundance or an act of robbery. It depends how it is used. My creations of promotional logos cover -

**Colour your life with Opal  
Opal - a Miracle of Nature  
Why don't you own a unique piece of Australia  
Opal Field Gems, every one a Masterpiece  
Nature's Fireworks**

All have now been used by others for considerable benefit to them and the opal game [thank you all].

We had six automatic slicing machines from Tibor Shelley cutting 5 and sometimes 6 times a week.

It was the first time anyone had used Henry Ford's system of production-line manufacturing in the opal game and we marketed 500,000 triplet a year.

In the early 70's I worked with Rod Griffin. He was a runner for our gems. He was a boy in short pants then but now he busily does his milk-run between mining on his giant excavators in the Queensland desert, dropping off sliced boulder opal to his factory in Asia and picking up finished product, then on he flies to USA to sell at trade fairs. Then back to S.W.Qld. to repeat the cycle. Rod Griffin [www.agta.org/info/agta-source-directory-member-1444.html](http://www.agta.org/info/agta-source-directory-member-1444.html)

In those years Andrew Cody was my triplet selling agent for Melbourne. Now look what he has developed. A remarkable achievement. [www.codyopal.com/](http://www.codyopal.com/)

He had an associate, Nick Le Souef who was an incredible man with snakes and spiders and once he spent several days locked in a shopfront window with the world's deadliest snakes and spiders around him [correct me if my facts are wrong, Andrew] Nick went on to own big retail shops in Alice Springs. Nick Le Souef <http://www.opals.net.au>

OPG had over a hundred regular wholesale clients and dozens of suppliers who were, and many still are deeply involved in the healthy and vibrant opal game. I will mention a few as we go along.



*The Oldfield family.. Jocelyn, David, Isaac (8) and Arah (6) at home in Innisfail Queensland*

I used to visit the top dozen or so of these clients in Sydney and Melbourne like clockwork every fortnight. Mister Sam Tsapazis in Coburg was my 0830 appointment every second Tuesday for well over a decade. Man, was I insane or what ?

Then Steve Copas and Andrew Cody and so on through the day..... I spent Wednesday in Sydney. One of my regulars there was Sherman Opals. I can still smell the smoke from Gregory's long skinny cigars, the chortling laughter of Warwick and the wickedly sharp humour of Peter, stanchions of the industry. Giants of men. Peter sherman: <http://www.shermanopals.com.au/home1.htm>

As well as 100's of thousands of triplets to sell them I had top quality crystals and blacks from Mintabie coming out of OPG by the thousands by 1980.

As I drank my coffee while they selected from my stock I would read the sign on the wall above Peter's head. "How can I fly like an eagle when I am surrounded by turkeys?" So true.

Our turkeys today are the bureaucrats, the politicians. You can always tell when a politician is lying. Look at his lips. If his lips are moving he is lying. Ha ha ha. So do not bother with them. They will never support you. All they want is our taxes and all of us mentioned in this article, stanchions of the "industry" have paid them millions, haven't we folks!

Later in the day I would see Gemtec and Max Lane would pour me another coffee and write me another cheque. Max Lane [www.gemtec.com.au](http://www.gemtec.com.au) [www.cliftonopal.com.au/company.html](http://www.cliftonopal.com.au/company.html)

John Iskendarian was another of my favourites. A brilliant jeweller. [ see website below] And then home to 29 King William Street with the pay cheques for my good staff. John Iskendarian: <http://www.opalsinformation.com/index.php/2012-02-16-03-29-08/photo-albums/default/picture/786>

I would regularly visit Tony Wong in Hong Kong, sell him triplets, buy his calibrated solids, have yum cha and come home. Tony Wong <http://www.opalsbytonywong.com>

In 1983 I had Bruce Harding join my team as public relations director for Opal Field Gems. Japan Ltd. He could do simultaneous interpretation both way with Japanese and English. Tell me how many people are that clever, ay!

He helped me bring the largest wedding kimono exhibition ever held outside Japan to Adelaide. We hired out the town hall and the Hilton hotel ballroom for the display of 200 wedding kimonos at a starting price [not for sale of course] of \$100,000 each.

All the couples who were married in them proudly showed them off. And Bruce and I were promoting the link between vibrant kimono colours and black opals.

Sadao Ikeguchi was the designer and maker of many beautiful kimonos we exhibited using silver and gold threads woven through the fabrics. We wheeled out bureaucrat premier John Bannon to take a little glory too.

Bruce Harding is a 6 foot 7 inch South Australian boy still living in Kyoto today, driving his latest model Porsche and creating opal jewellery of the best quality and artistry you could ever see. He has shops in Russia, exhibitions in Hong Kong and has taken out the top award there for the past 10 years running. He sells all over Japan too. His website is the best site with the best opal gems I have ever seen. Bruce Harding <http://kyotobruce.com>

Watch his 5 minute promo. It is exceptional. See his abundance and realise the opal game is alive and thriving. You can watch it in perfect Japanese or Russian or English version, please yourself.

In Adelaide my favourite competitor was Olympic Opal Company. After 30 years of silence I contacted Con Arsinikakis and we chatted for a long time this week. We had each other in tears of laughter. One story he told me went like this.

David, you remember when you were treasurer of Australian Gem Industry Association and one day I meet you at a committee meeting and I shake your left hand so hard and so long and you say what is this for Con? Why won't you let my hand go?

And Con said, "David you make me! You make me a big cutter! You make me a successful man!"

I look in the mirror every morning and I say Who is this in my mirror , I have two arm, David Oldfield has two arms I have two legs, he has two legs I have one brain, he has one brain ..... Yes I can beat him, I can beat him! And so you make me, David ! You make me big cutter. You make me what I am today , Thank you david. And then he let my hand go.

Well when he retold this story in his lovely greek/english accent I laughed so hard . It was so good to see the vigour and excitement in this 74 year old champion of the opal game. Bravo to you, Con. You are no greek grocer.

I sold the business of Opal Field Gems at the end of 1988 but that was not the end of me and my addiction to opal. When it gets into your blood there is no cure, mate.

So from 1989 to now I have been delving into the artistry of opal. Carving and learning how to compliment Mother Nature's calling card [opal] And that is my next promo logo so please do not use it for a decade or so. OK boys? Is that a deal ?

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David Oldfield with sons Isaac and Arah in 2014

In 1994 I met Eddie Maguire of Yowah . He is a carver of opal. He saw my early attempts at sculpturing opal and we sure got some ideas and stimulation from our meeting. He is so in love with opal it is like a religion to him. See his "the Maguire Collection" Eddie Maguire: <http://www.paroo.info/BusinessNetwork/EarthTreasuresMaguireOpalCollection.aspx>

And he is continuing to build that collection for the rest of his life. a legend of an artist.<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rockandmineralsupermarketaustralia/sets/72157624547011745/>

Recently I met Michael and Lorrae Clark in Koroit. See Michael's extraordinary talent and devotion to opal sculpturing at Michael and Lorrae Clark: [http://michaelclarkartopalsculptures.blogspot.com.au/2012\\_08\\_01\\_archive.html](http://michaelclarkartopalsculptures.blogspot.com.au/2012_08_01_archive.html)

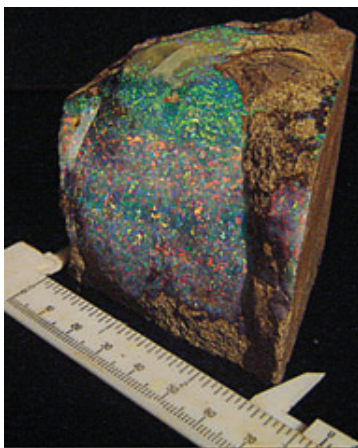
Tanya Maguire and Trafford Hughes are also people of great abundance that I know. Tanya Maguire - Opal Bus Stop Yowah: <http://www.action-graphics.com.au/matilda/pages/eulo/euloyowah.html>

Trafford Hughes is mentioned here: <http://www.outthebackaustralia.com/index.php/destinations/yowah/28-main-menu>

If you meet people like I have mentioned in this story, and you can virtually meet them on their websites, you must be able to see the abundance ,the devotion, the beauty and the strength of the opal game and the great artists and devotees of mother earth's calling card, opal.

Another great icon I have met is Mr. George Fickling . An amazing man and opal miner. The outback stories he tells are wonderful. He should have his bronze in the R.M.William's hall of fame. A true aussie icon and gentleman . His son, Dennie has a great website showing off his great works. Dennie Fickling: <http://www.dfopals.com.au/about.html>.

In about 2003 I bought the best Queensland boulder opal specimen I have ever seen in my life from George.



It was the King-stone in a rather large parcel. [see the photo] You can see it has two faces The cap stone made a gem grade split, the same as the face in the photo. So it has three faces each about 70mm x 70 mm; a massive area of gem grade opal. This photo does not do it justice because it is truly beautiful.

Last month I heard from a friend that it was for sale at this year's Tucson fair for US\$120,000.

So there you have it . Opal is a game. And you have to be game to be in it .



### Opal Field Gems—a name to trust

Under the direction of internationally respected opal specialist David Oldfield, ours has become the largest gem cutting operation in Australia. We have been established since 1968 and our success is based on a philosophy of integrity and craftsmanship. Our high standards are evident in our products and in our service.

With every purchase you receive a life-long guarantee. A 30% sales tax exemption is applicable to international travellers.

#### Associations

- Australian Gem Industry Association
- Australia/Japan Association
- Adelaide Convention and Visitors Bureau
- American Chamber of Commerce in Australia
- Australia/Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc.
- Sydney Chamber of Commerce
- Australian Institute of Export
- Productivity Promotion Council of Australia
- South Australian Tourist Association
- Austrade

#### Branches

- Osaka - Japan
- Sunshine Coast - Queensland
- Perth - Western Australia

For Export and Trade Enquiries telephone

0011 61 8 212 5300, Fax 0011 61 8 231 9529.

## Opal Field Gems

### Opal Field Gems Business Brochure from 30 years ago

The conclusion is that the opal game is vibrant and strong. All these folk I have given you websites of are proof of their abundance and of the abundance of Australian Opal. And here is one more iconic artist for you to view. Alex Mendelsohn of Andamooka: <http://andamooka.sa.au/alex-mendelsohn> <http://alexmendelsohn.wix.com/artworld> This is the most important talk on opal and art you may ever hear: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XUH25gQNCY>

He now resides in Arizona but still calls Andamooka his home. See the vibrance of opal in his painting. An inspiration to you all. God Bless you, my old friend, Alex.

We may have given Asia too much of a chance to compete with us. We may have taken a blow from Ethiopian opals. We may have to contend with Gilson and other artificials. But in the end ,look what we still have. Look at what we have. Not at what we have lost. Is your glass half empty or half full? My glass is full to overflowing with the abundance of life And part of my life is opal. I find the Aboriginal dreamtime story about opal tells it all.

"In the beginning, when the sun had finished its daily track across the sky it would touch the desert in the west. It would sizzle and burn into that desert land until it went cold and darkness came. Every day it would start again in the east, until this present time.

When we dig up that desert land and find opal and hold it in our hand it glows with every colour because the sun is in that rock. The colour is bursting out and reminding us it was created by the Sun. that is capital S Sun. Just like some have capital G God. And so I find opal not only precious but sacred because it is part of mother earth.

I say "opal is Mother Earth's tears reminding us to take care of Her." That is another promotional logo I am starting to use so do not use that one for a decade or two . O.K. boys, is that a deal too?

Now , I only have a hundred years or so left so I better get back to my Opal art, Ay !

David Oldfield Email: [peacefarmtribe@ig.com.au](mailto:peacefarmtribe@ig.com.au)

## Birds around town



The Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo that visits Cooper Pedy has a delightful song. This bird does not raise it's own young, but lays her eggs in the nests of other species



The Zebra Finch is a regular visitor to Cooper Pedy and other arid areas



Singing Honeyeaters are seen in Cooper Pedy the whole year round



Mother sparrow takes food up to offspring inside power pole