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Archaeology, and the History of Port Essington

A Precis

F. J. Allen

This thesis is an investigation into the use of archaeology as a technique for widening the range of historical evidence in the recent past. It records the first professional excavations of a European site in Australia, Port Essington in the Northern Territory. Consequently chapters 2 - 5 are concerned with describing the excavations and architecture remaining at Port Essington, and the methods and results of the analysis of a body of artefacts of types which have not been adequately described (at least in archaeological terms) elsewhere. The main object of this protracted analysis is to take full advantage of the unique opportunities of the site which was occupied for only eleven years and which has remained largely undisturbed since, thus providing a closely dated context for the artefacts which were recovered.

A second major area of enquiry in this section is the analysis of an Aboriginal assemblage of implements made from bottle glass obtained from the European settlement.

The implications of this collection are several:

1. It is the archaeological reflection of the impact of the Europeans upon the indigenous people.
2. It supports a hypothesis that the reasons for the non-manufacture of stone implements in the coastal regions of Arnhem Land may simply be explained as one of environmental determinism rather than cultural preference.
3. It adds important new information for the discussion of glass artefacts found elsewhere in the world.

The second section is a brief history of the settlement. Chapter 6 examines the reasons for the establishment of Port Essington and suggests that the commercial reasons suggested by previous historians may be less important than the political considerations behind the establishment. Chapters 7 and 8 relate the history of the settlement, chapter 8 introducing the archaeological data as historical evidence. Chapter 9 suggests that following the discussion in chapter 6, Port Essington might well be regarded as a success rather than the failure it is generally considered to have been. The final chapter discusses the value of archaeology as a research tool for the recent historical past.

ARCHAEOLOGY, AND THE HISTORY OF PORT ESSINGTON

by

F. J. ALLEN

VOLUME I

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fulfilment of the requirements for  
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This thesis is the product of field and library research by the author. Apart from the acknowledged assistance from specialists in various fields it is my own original work.

*Jim Allen*

F. J. Allen  
2 May 1969.

"By mid-century the British had not yet solved the problem of settlement on the northern coast but they had securely established a pattern of failure that was to stand as a model for some years to come."

C. Hartley Grattan.

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