Full Citation Details:
The site excavated at Port Arthur last January and February was continuously occupied during the penal establishment days of Port Arthur, that is from 1830 to 1877. Long wooden buildings on brick and stone foundations housed prisoners from 1830 to 1854. Mostly they were in a deteriorating state and were constantly being rebuilt, propped up or were just let fall down. In the mid-1850s when there was a transferral of lunatic convicts from various outstations to Port Arthur, these people were housed on the site. It remained an area for invalids and paupers until the closure of the penal settlement. The buildings on the site remained in use afterwards but some were destroyed by 1893 and 1897 bushfires; by the early twentieth century there are no buildings here visible on photographs.

As part of a wide-ranging programme of research at Port Arthur I investigated this site last year. Its importance lies in the fact that it is the only part of Port Arthur continuously occupied during its entire convict period and by such large groups of people. Even so documentation about it is fairly minimal; the plans are largely inconsistent and incomplete and there appear to be more proposed than actual plans in existence. If one was testing the archaeological potential of a site in Port Arthur, it seemed that this would be the best area to choose.

We uncovered the remains of five buildings during the last season. The exact perimeters of each are at present undefined but documentary evidence should help to pin-point them and the accuracy of this will be tested by excavation next season. As well areas of brick paving and cobblestones were uncovered. Most buildings and courtyard areas were associated with at least one drain, mainly of terracotta but sometimes of stone, and almost always containing a great quantity of artefacts.

The artefacts associated with these structures covered a very wide range. There were hundreds of iron nails as expected, hundreds of iron and bone buttons unexpectedly, coins ranging from a 1935 halfpenny to two 1799 halfpennies to mid-nineteenth century Hobart Town traders tokens, much glass and transfer printed pottery, pins, needles, thimbles, slate pencils, chalk, clay pipes and more. The analysis of these is not yet complete but some interesting details are emerging. Two of the clay pipes, for example, made probably by Murray of Glasgow were intended for the American market but arrived here anyway. One has Uncle Tom and his Cabin moulded on to its bowl; the other has the American flag on one side and the Union Jack on the other.

In the next season I wish to explore certain problems about building phases and extents arising from the last season. To enable my site plans to be more accurately aligned with the convict period plans and maps of Port Arthur I need to locate the well and the block of solitary cells on the site. I propose doing this in December 1977 and January and February 1978.

Maureen Byrne