

Stinker's History: Pure Grit On Fingal Island

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The Grit Hole on the northern face of Fingal Island.

COLLECTING shell grit was a steady source of income during the tough times of the Depression years and there were ample supplies of the crushed shell from Boat Harbour and Rocky Point to Broughton Island.

The grit was purchased by poultry companies to strengthen the egg shell and to use as a cushion when the eggs were to be packed in boxes for transport.

One of the richest deposits of the naturally crushed shell was on Fingal Island in a small bay aptly named 'Shelly' or the 'Grit Hole'.

Arthur Murdoch found himself unemployed in 1929 and left Newcastle to seek a livelihood.

He commenced bagging shell grit on Fingal Island in 1930 and remained till the end of the decade, living in a humpy built close to the Grit Hole.

The view towards Broughton Island would have been spectacular.

Speaking of island experiences and the dangerous 'Spit', Arthur stated, "The fact that it (the Spit) existed made our lives a bit more hazardous.

“If it had been an island, in fact, everybody would have accepted island life and would have made all their crossings to the mainland by boat; they would have accepted that rough seas would keep them on the island.”

Arthur lived an idyllic life on the island and recorded his experiences in a wonderful book ‘Sheer Grit’ from which I have borrowed his final entry.

“When at last, it is my turn to leave, I would like one last look at the sea and islands.

“I will leave my hut, in my will, as a home for homeless lighthouse keepers.

“I will ask that my ashes be scattered, half on Shelly, a quarter on the southern lease, one-eighth on the road I made and one-eighth at the lighthouse.

“At last, then, my ashes will solve what I never could do in the flesh: how to be in four different places at once.”

Born in 1906 Arthur Murdoch died in 1993 and with the help of friends he was granted his final wish.

By John ‘Stinker’ CLARKE



Arthur Murdoch and the Calvert family outside Arthur’s island hut.