

# Forest pioneer honoured

**DICK Perry first saw Gnangara as a young forester in 1925, arriving in a horse drawn sulky.**

His recent visit was an easy car drive through the suburbs, past the pine plantation he helped to establish, to the official opening of Perry Island.

The artificial island is part of the public open space at Ellenbrook, a residential development next to the Gnangara plantation. The island was named after Dick as a tribute to his pioneering work, which is explained on a series of information panels on the island.

Douglas Humphry Perry was born in 1902 in Sussex, England, and emigrated to Australia with his family in 1912.

He left school at 14, determined to be a farmer, but his mother persuaded him to apply for the first apprenticeships advertised by the Woods and Forests Department.

It was not only outdoor work, but unlike most apprenticeships, it paid a wage: ten shillings for a 48 hour week, plus study time, and a weekly allowance of 12 shillings and six pence.



*Dick Perry in 1922*

Dick and Jack Thomson became the Department's first apprentices and started work in 1917 at the tree nursery in Hamel, south of Pinjarra. Both men spent their entire working lives with the Forests Department.

Dick's career stretched more than 50 years, during which time he worked on a great variety of projects, from surveying native forests on horseback to stabilising the sand dunes at Swanbourne.

Most significant of all was his work on maritime pine, or *Pinus pinaster*, which began in the 1920s.

The first pine seedlings

grown at the 'remote' Gnangara nursery turned bright yellow and wouldn't grow.

A missing fungus was responsible, one that helps roots to take up nutrients from the soil. The Gnangara nursery was growing healthy pines by 1929, but they still grew slowly in the plantation.

The Forests Department requisitioned half a ton of superphosphate and a quarter of a ton of blood and bone to use for trials—a novel request rejected by Treasury officials, horrified at the thought of having to fertilise whole plantations.

Treasury finally relented and to everyone's relief, the pines grew much better, but only needed to be fertilised on planting and then about every seven years afterwards.

In 1957, Forests Department scientist Dr Eric Hopkins began a tree-breeding program to produce pines with more useable timber, better suited to WA conditions.

There was a shortage of suitable parent trees growing in WA, so in 1963, the Department sent Dick to Portugal to collect cut-



*Family and Executive Director Syd Shea joined Dick at the official opening of Perry Island. From left to right: John McMahon (son-in-law), Dr Syd Shea, Peter Keynes (grandson), Dick Perry, Krystal Keynes (great grand daughter) and Nancy McMahon (daughter). Photo by Clayton Sanders.*

tings, pollen and seed.

He and his wife went to the Forest of Leiria, originally planted by royal decree in the 1300s and the source of the best performing maritime pine in WA.

The Perrys walked the forest for two years and finally identified 85 trees that were taller, straighter

and had less defects than their neighbours. They estimated that they looked at 250,000 trees for each one they finally selected.

The best trees were photographed and then had to be climbed—about five times in all to take different measurements and to collect samples to send

back to WA. Hundreds of buds were collected, some of them from 130 feet above the ground.

By the 1990s, the descendants of these clones were 70 per cent more productive than the original trees grown at Gnangara, a figure CALM scientists expect to

improve on as the maritime pine breeding program continues.

In 1991, Dick received Membership of the Order of Australia for his contribution to forestry and entomology. In 1995, he was made an Honorary Member of the Institute of Foresters of Australia.



PERRY ISLAND  
NAMED IN HONOUR OF THE  
PIONEERING FORESTRY WORK  
OF  
Mr DICK PERRY  
12 NOVEMBER 1997

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