





FOREST FOCUS

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Early History of JARRAHDALE

by Librarian ED. WILLIS

With the centenary celebrations of Jarrahdale taking place in May 1972 it seems an appropriate time to recount the early history of this important timber centre.

Jarrahdale's history begins in October 1869. The struggling colony of Western Australia had just received a new governor. Governor Weld had been appointed in the hope that he would be able to infuse some vitality into the colony's flagging economy. There were barely 24,000 people living in the colony at the time and its progress lagged considerably behind the eastern colonies. Weld had earned a good reputation in New Zealand as a cabinet minister with progressive views on the use of local resources.

Attracting capital

He took the initiative in offering attractive conditions to capitalists in the hope they might be persuaded to invest in the colony. The main difficulties the timber companies had to contend with was the distance of transport to the port of shipment. This necessitated the laying down of railways entailing the expenditure of large amounts of capital. The lack of local capital precluded any extensive local initiative but several eastern Australian companies became interested in the forests of Western Australia as a suitable source of timber for public works, mainly harbours and railways. Between 1869 and 1871 there were three separate infusions of capital into the local timber industry. Jarrahdale was to be the largest of these undertakings.

Negotiations for the Jarrahdale project commenced on 26 September, 1870, when William Wanliss wrote to the Colonial Secretary suggesting a timber concession in the Cockburn Sound district. These discussions

were concluded successfully and the approval of the home government obtained. The major backers of the project were from Ballarat, Victoria.

The original syndicate did not last long and a new company was founded in June 1871 by several Ballarat businessmen. Under the terms of the agreement the syndicate was granted a concession of 250,000 acres of excellent jarrah forest at a peppercorn rental. The new company called itself the Rockingham Jarrah Timber Company Limited. The concession was originally granted for only 13 years but it was renewed subsequently on several occasions and did not in fact expire until late 1929. The company enjoyed exclusive rights of exploitation.

A port was to be established at Rockingham (one of several built by the company) and connected to a mill at Jarrahdale by rail. In the agreement the company also had to supply and maintain a steam tug for the use of general shipping at Rockingham.

Little time was lost in getting things under way. As there was no railway from Perth to Bunbury at this time, or roads of any consequence, the transport of equipment to the mill site was extremely difficult. The mill machinery was taken to a point 35 miles from Perth on the Albany road and 10 miles from the mill site. A track was then cut through the forest to Jarrahdale. A Thomsons road steamer, a large and cumbersome traction engine, was brought in to transport the heavier machinery.

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Front cover

Red-capped parrot (Purpureicephalus spurius) photographed at the Zoological Gardens, South Perth.

Back cover

The Christmas Tree Well, see "Forestscapes", page 15.

Historic photographs

Acknowledgement is made to Millars Aust. Pty. Ltd. for the use of historic photographs appearing in this edition.

◀ *Nos. 1 and 2 jetties, Rockingham, before the turn of the century. The ship on the far right was from Grimstad, Norway. Wooden rails can be seen in foreground.*

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This was received with delight by all, especially the youngsters, in the white community but terrorised the aborigines when they saw it puffing along spewing sparks and steam. The aborigines declared it must be "Jingey", meaning the devil.

Wooden rails

The first mill was quite a large one for those days, with an 80 h.p. engine, two large marine boilers, an output of 21,000 super feet a day and employed 200 men, many of them from the eastern colonies. The mill came into operation in May 1872 and the railway to Rockingham was completed by November 1872. The line was built of sawn jarrah rails spiked to sleepers and joined with iron plates at the curves to prevent derailments. Its total length was 23 miles. The locomotive to be used on the line had already arrived in December 1871, and as a tribute to the governor was named the "Governor Weld". This was the second locomotive in the colony.

Exports

Increasing interest in Western Australian timbers is reflected by the expanding income from the export of timber from the colony. Export earnings from timber grew from £14,274 in 1869 to £82,052 in 1890. The figures in the table are from the Western Australian yearbook for 1890 and indicate the nature of Jarrahdale's contribution to the timber trade.

During 1894-5 some 30,000 loads were exported to London and other markets, and over 10,000 loads supplied to the local market during the same period.

Jarrahdale in 1882

A correspondent of the Perth newspaper *The Inquirer* visited Jarrahdale in May 1882 and was most impressed with what he saw:

Starting from Rockingham where two or three ships may often be

JARRAHDALÉ

<i>Loads (1 load=50 cu.ft.)</i>	<i>Exported to</i>	<i>Purpose for which exported</i>
2,674	Port Adelaide	Building scantling, bridge and wharf building.
1,025	Melbourne	Harbour Trust work.
637	Natal	Harbour work, etc.
2,770	London	Paving streets, bridges and harbour works.

seen loading railway sleepers for the southern colonies, one is struck with the ease and rapidity with which timber can be shipped from the Rockingham jetty. The station at Jarrahdale is 23 miles distant and is reached by the company's railway.

Jarrahdale is situated on either side of a running brook, the place is dotted with numerous little cottages, the residences of the sawyers, all clean and comfortable. The manager has a large and comfortable residence, and there are the usual offices and stores.

There is a school house and a Good Templars lodge room built by them at their own expense. This room is also open during the week as a reading room, the charge for membership being moderate. The library contains 100 volumes and a similar number is about to be added. By coach mail a large number of English and colonial newspapers and periodicals arrive, the list of which would be creditable to any literary institute.

Every effort has been made to banish the vice of drunkenness and gambling, the Good Templars exercising a moral influence over the station which is happily encouraged by the manager Mr. Rigg but it is regretted visits by the clergy are few and far between. They will perhaps awake someday to the fact that about 300 souls have been without a spiritual adviser.

By 1890 the residents' spiritual welfare was being well catered for with the establishment of Anglican and Wesleyan churches.

Railway line upgraded

The original syndicate folded in 1889 and a new company, the Neil McNeil & Company, Jarrahdale Timber Station, was formed by several prominent Melbourne businessmen. Neil McNeil was the managing director of the company. Increasing business prompted the syndicate to upgrade the railway line, and the wooden line was replaced by steel rails joined by fish-plates and dogged to sleepers in the normal way. Two extra locomotives were also brought in.

The Perth-Bunbury government line had to cross the private Jarrahdale-Rockingham line near Mundijong at right angles and it was the only known "H" crossing in Australia. This type of crossing, not normally permissible in railway construction, was allowable only because the private line was built first.

Mundijong was the main stacking area for the mill output. Jarrahdale's proximity to Perth brought it a large and profitable local trade. Mundijong's location at the rail junction made it a busy centre where the mill products were either directed to Perth, or to Rockingham for export.



▲ One of the early Jarrahdale mills, photographed about 1901.

▼ Locos "Pioneer" and "Samson No. 2" double banked with a rake of logs.







◀ Taken near the turn of the century, this shows huge jarrah trees and quality of forest early sawmillers cut over. Effective conservation controls to ensure permanent life for sawmills were introduced with the passing of the Forests Act in 1918.

▲ Pay day, 1900.

▼ A whim drawn by some of the 140 horses.



A. C. Munro was a key figure in Jarrahdale's development. He first arrived there in 1887 to relieve the manager while he was on holiday. The original mill had burnt down and Munro was responsible for replacing it. Upon the return of the manager Munro went back to Victoria but was recalled as manager in 1892. Under his energetic leadership Jarrahdale prospered.

Jarrahdale in 1896

J. Ednie Brown, the first Conservator of Forests, visited Jarrahdale in 1896 on a tour of inspection. In his official report he wrote:

The operations were begun here some 20 years ago, with one mill only. Other mills have been added from time to time, so that at present there are five upon the property in full working order in the forests, besides a very fine planing and grooving mill at Jarrahdale Junction (Mundijong).

There are generally about 120 hands employed in and about the mills, and some 200 otherwise engaged upon the estate in connection with its working.

To keep these works going, 140 horses and 100 bullocks are required.

The tramway system here is very extensive and amounts to over 60 miles in length. The railway from the mill yard to Rockingham is well laid and very serviceable, both for passenger and goods traffic.

I understand from Mr. Munro, the energetic manager, that the out-put of timber from these mills is about 2,500 loads (1 load=50 cubic feet) monthly; and that this large quantity has been the monthly return during the last couple of years.

The timber is disposed of locally and by export in about equal parts. Considerable quantities are sent to the other colonies, and large shipments are made to England in connection with the street-paving trade.

Mr. Munro estimates that at least 260,000 loads of sawn stuff have been turned out here since the works began.

The forest consists of jarrah principally with the usual intermixture of red gum and occasional clumps of blackbutt. Upon the low-lying portions and foot hills of the range of the concession there is a fair sprinkling of wandoo of good character.

The jarrah forest produces timber of good quality. There are some very fine belts or masses of the tree, and it is not uncommon to come across specimens containing from 5 to 10 loads each.

It is estimated that some 70,000 acres of the property have been cut over to date, but upon this there is still a large quantity of good timber yet available. The area cut over is said to have produced so far, about five loads of sawn timber per acre.


The recuperation of the forest where it has been cut out is going on satisfactorily by natural regeneration, and its permanency as a forest may be safely predicted, if care be taken over the young crop.

A word of commendation is due for the excellence and general arrangements of the jetties at Rockingham. The structures have been well built and are serviceable in every way.

A large new jetty has recently been built which accommodates two very large ships at once, and the total berthing accommodation is now sufficient for five ships at once.

In March 1892 there was a further reorganisation of the Jarrahdale concern when a new company was floated which was later known as the Rockingham Railway and Jarrahdale Timber Company. Due to the expansion of business in the 1890s it was decided to incorporate the company in London, and it was registered there as the Jarrahdale Jarrah Forests & Railway Limited on 25 October, 1897. Business was carried on under this name until the company amalgamated with eight other companies to form Millars Karri & Jarrah Forests Company Limited in 1902.

Jarrahdale has continued as an important timber centre but with the advent of the deeper Fremantle harbour to cater for steam vessels, allowing for a faster delivery and return of ships, the busy little port of Rockingham began to languish and finally finished exporting in 1902 shortly after the amalgamation.

The Jarrahdale-Rockingham line remained unused for many years but was kept open by sending one train each year to the jetty until the upkeep became too costly. The rails between Mundijong and Rockingham were finally pulled up in 1952. The section between Jarrahdale and Mundijong was not removed until 1960. 

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reduced the incidence and spread of summer wildfires.

It is difficult to foresee a practical alternative for prescribed burning in maintaining effective control over summer fires in these forests. A large and well-equipped force of fire-fighters is insufficient to contain very intense fires burning in heavy fuels during the worst summer days.

Considerable research effort has been expended to ensure prescribed fires are lit under conditions when damage to flora and fauna of the forest is negligible, while significantly reducing the fuels (see "Birds of the Jarrah Forest", this issue).

There are reasonably clear indications that prescribed burning in spring is considerably less damaging to the forest environment than burning in autumn. There is also the suggestion that the abundance of ground flora suffers if fire is excluded from the forest altogether.

Damage can only be avoided if prescribed burning is done with mild fires which consume only the lighter "flashy" fuels such as litter and dead scrub. This type of burning must be done when heavy fuels such as logs and branchwood are too damp to burn, thereby providing one of the