

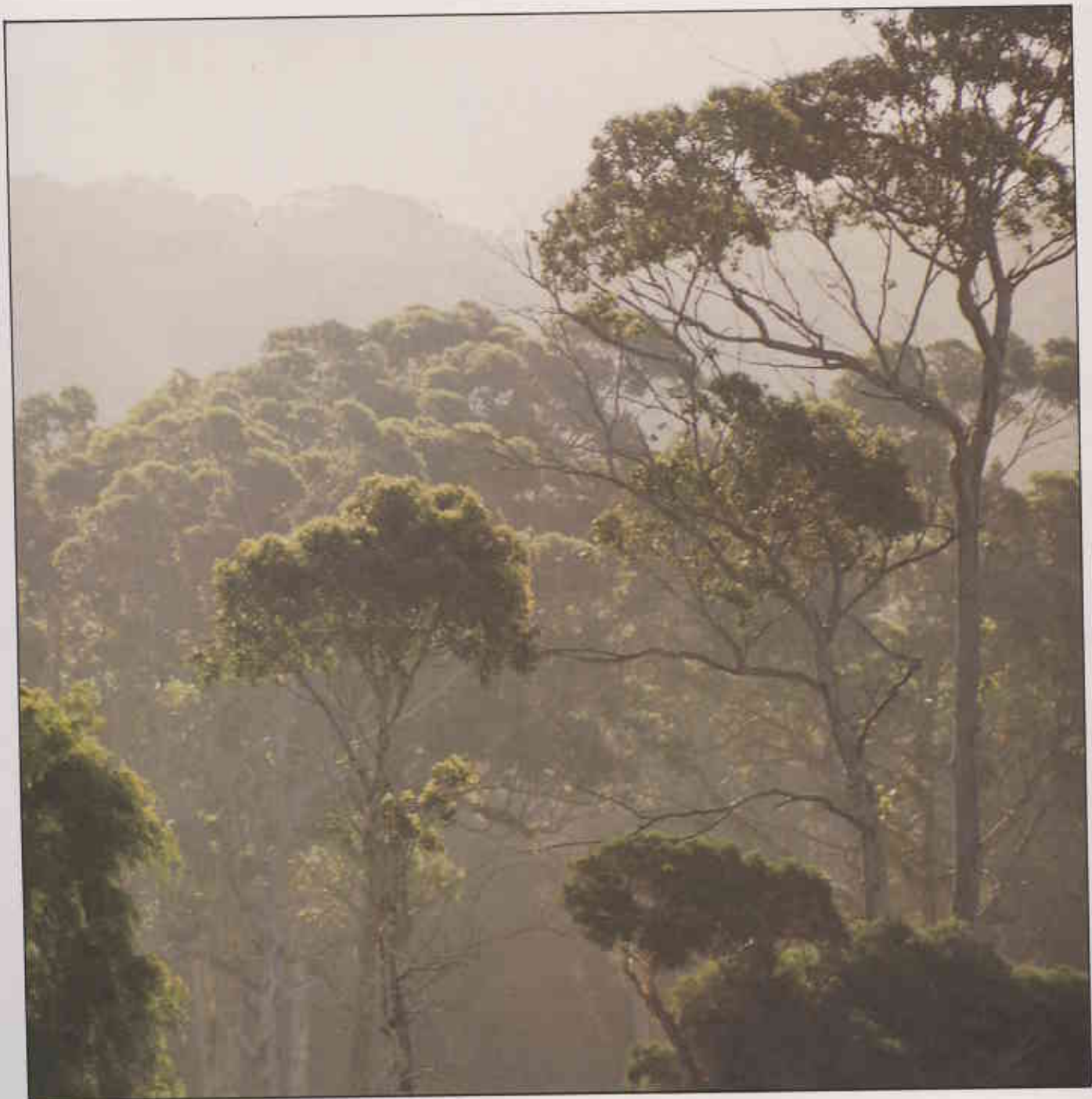
Some of the oldest traces of human habitation in the south-west were found in the Devil's Lair cave which was occupied by Aborigines at least 25 000, and possibly 30 000 years ago.

Devil's Lair — so-called because it also contained fossil remains of a Tasmanian Devil — is part of a system of limestone caves which run under the Boranup karri forest. To the Aborigines, the area was known as the place of a male dingo.

The Boranup has many fascinating tales to tell. Here Cliff Winfield recounts one part of Boranup's history.

The story of—

Maurice Coleman Davies: TIMBER TYCOON



ALITTLE over a hundred and ten years ago an enterprising colonialist from Adelaide visited the south-west of Western Australia. The projects he envisaged in 1875 influenced the development, economy and environment of this State for a very long time.

Maurice Coleman Davies began his career on the Victorian goldfields where he built a business trading in mining engineering supplies. In a partnership of Davies, Wishart and Baillie he successfully tendered for the construction of a major part of the Melbourne to Adelaide railway. South Australia was bereft of structural timber, so in search of 14 000 cubic feet of timber he looked to the tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) forest of the west. After surveying the timber resources of the south-west during his 1875 visit Davies decided to invest in the industry. Early in 1876 he returned and purchased a large share in Jarrahdale and Rockingham Timber Company — the State's first timber export company.

Once the big trees grew almost to the seashore.

In 1879 Davies began pestering the government for a lease on what was described as a 'forest wilderness' in a strip a few kilometres wide and stretching some 40 km south of the Margaret River. Conveniently adjacent were two natural ports at Flinders Bay and Hamelin Bay— where once the big trees grew almost to the seashore. The only trouble was that the majority of the big trees were karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolour*), unheard of in London where 'West Australian timber' meant jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*).

Trial consignments, some of which Davies accompanied personally, were sent to bridge builders, mining and railway engineers all over the world. In his inimitable way, Davies had a magistrate come down from



Vasse to take a declaration from Alfred Bussell that karri logs hauled out of the Blackwood River were those that he and his brothers had toppled in there nearly 50 years earlier. The magistrate testified that despite the immersion the logs were as 'sound as a bell'. Davies came upon a log which had been submerged in the southern ocean for a known 30 years. It was sent to Kew gardens so that clients might witness karri's durability themselves. The British Admiralty timber inspector tested karri and found it stronger than jarrah. Armed with these testimonials, Davies convinced prospective customers that karri was superior to jarrah in every situation. In time this proved to be not quite true as jarrah outlasts karri in moist underground applications and termite-prone areas — nevertheless karri timber was available in immense unbroken lengths, the best available for superstructures such as bridges

and wharf scantlings, and mine poppet heads.

The government of 1882 granted Davies a 42-year-lease on 46 000 acres at a miniscule fee of £150 per year, the freehold option on some land adjoining and eight 50 acre blocks at Hamelin Bay for 10 shillings each. Two-thirds of the land was forested with jarrah/marri (*Eucalyptus calophylla*) and the rest karri. The lease allowed Davies to take all millable timber available on the land for the duration, on condition that he develop an industry producing 120 000 superfeet* per month of sawn

* A superficial foot is strange measurement to people outside sawmilling circles. It is a theoretical volume measurement of a piece of sawn timber 12 inches wide by 1 inch thick by 12 inches (1 foot) long. That is 1/12 cubic foot. Timber, however, is rarely cut 1" thick or 12" wide. A more typical beam might have been 6" x 4" x 20ft — 40 superfeet. An easier conversion might be 1 000 superfeet = 2.4 cubic metres.

timber within three years and a jetty at Hamelin Bay of 13 foot minimum draft within 12 months. The Hamelin jetty was built promptly, 1 800 feet long, capable of berthing three ships at a time with steam cranes alongside, fresh water laid on from a spring and telephone facilities to the company's new head office in nearby Karridale.

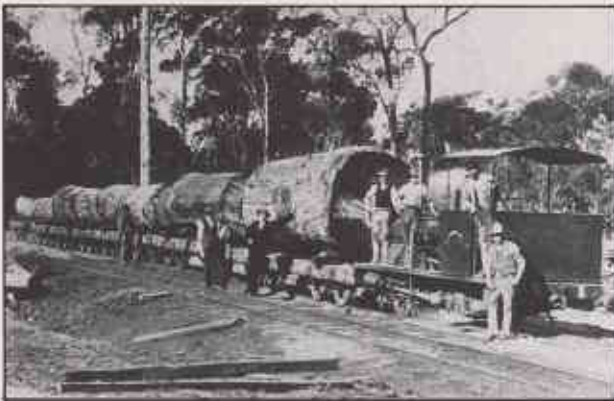
In 1884 a new mill, the most advanced in the colony, with the first vertical breaking down bench and a capacity of 12 000 superfeet per day was built at Karridale. The forests, mills and

port were interconnected with a railway. Two small steam engines were purchased and numerous rolling stock were built at the company's new workshop at Karridale. Already the business was much too big for one man to manage.

Davies was the father of a large family - six boys and two girls. The boys had joined him as assistant managers, all being taught by experience every aspect of the timber milling business from felling to selling. His wife and daughters were to remain in Adelaide until a comfortable residence was built

in Karridale. In his 50th year Davies constructed a 29 room mansion, known as the 'Big House' at Karridale, and in 1885 the whole family called Karridale home.

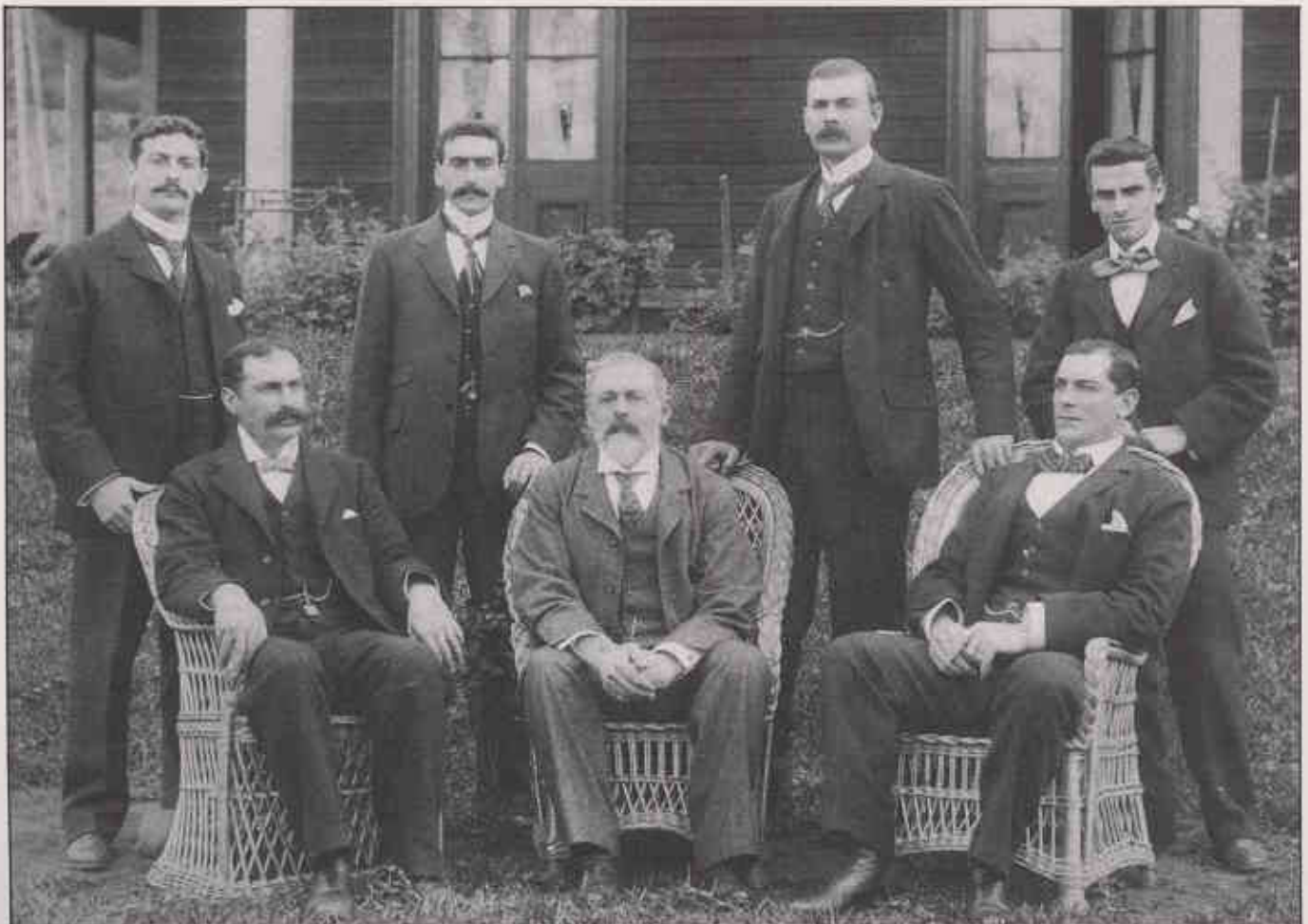
Davies treated his workers as though they were a big family. Although wages were low — from seven to thirteen shillings per day the company provided workers with a cottage rent free. It paid for a doctor and a clergyman and built a hospital, town hall, school, racecourse and a library regularly stocked with books from Mudies in



A rake of logs from one giant karri tree (left)

All that remains of the huge jetty that was built to export timber from Hamelin Bay. The anchorage now serves anglers and pleasure craft (right).

M. C. Davies and his sons in front of the 'Big House' in 1899 (below).



London. Consumables, including fresh fruit and vegetables from the company orchards and gardens and meat from its farm, as well as every conceivable item, could be bought from the company's store. The company had an agreement with the workers allowing a 10 per cent mark-up on Perth prices to cover freight.

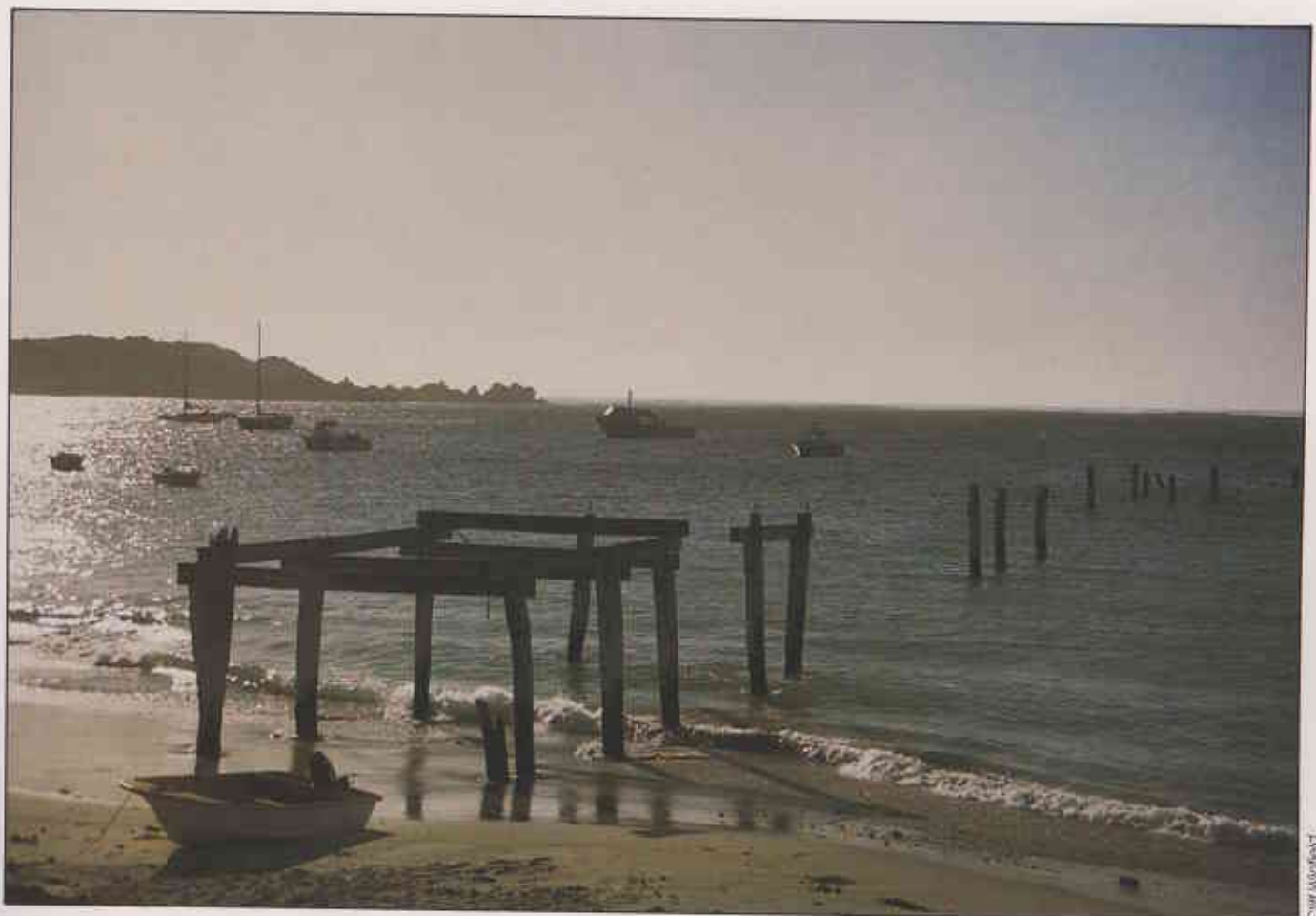
Being so isolated, the company was able to instigate a cash-free society, with workers having an account with the company against which they could trade at the store. Workers who had more than £10 in credit attracted interest at a rate of five per cent per annum. When workers left the community they were paid in Davies & Co. 'banknotes' — cheques which could be redeemed for cash at any bank in the colony. The isolation also enabled the company to keep the community virtually free of alcohol, apart from the gift of a bottle of rum to adult males and a bottle of port to adult females at Christmas time. When Davies

ordered a grand piano for the Big House, his wife Sarah insisted on ordering a second for the community hall. These workers' benefits were obviously a small price to pay for industrial peace and worker dedication whilst the profits rolled in.

And the best was yet to come. The 1890's were to be the heydays for the Davies family. In 1891 a new steam mill was commissioned at Boranup but was destroyed by fire a few years later and promptly replaced with a bigger one. In 1895 the Jarrahdene mill opened with a capacity of 21 000 superfeet per day. During this period Davies restructured his company to take his sons in as partners; they were all experienced in every aspect of the timber industry by now, and they were subsequently assigned tasks of importance within the operation.

In 1900, however, the company started to sink. The lack of buoyancy was attributed

(in the London Financial Times' report to shareholders informing them that there would be no dividend for the past financial year) to 'keen competition, over-production, increase of freights, and, lastly, the war in South Africa'. They were not alone; all of the major Western Australian timber traders were in dire straits. After protracted negotiations, mostly in London boardrooms, the company amalgamated with its major opposition and several others to become Millars' Karri and Jarrah Forests (1902) Limited. Davies stepped aside, but most of his sons held management positions in the new company in other mills and overseas for many years. The Millars company traded its way out of difficulty, but by 1907 the timber resource at Karridale had dwindled and the Hamelin port closed. Davies retired to his house in Perth near the old Barracks where he died in 1913, within weeks of the closure of the last mill on the Karridale estate.





Cliff Winfield

In 1961 fire eventually claimed the remnants of Karridale estate which had once housed 800 residents. Today a magnificent young karri forest, regrown from the cut out timber lease, stands in national park and State forest as testament to nature's amazing recuperative powers. Only remnant foundations and chimneys remain of the mills, and rotting stumps jutting out into the Southern Ocean verify the existence of the magnificent piers.

Only the Big House - moved to Margaret River in the 1950's to become a convent and later a restaurant - remains. Davies' Karridale estate has disappeared almost without trace.



Cliff Winfield

The 'Big House' — now a restaurant in Margaret River (above).

Once a timber yard, the peppermints have grown back to form what is now a popular campsite at Hamelin Bay (left and below).

Looking at the forest today it is hard to believe that for over thirty years every stick of millable timber was removed (right).

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Cliff Winfield



Landscape

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COVER

Moonrise on wheat stubble.
Cover photo by Cliff Winfield.



Southern Brown Bandicoot drinking Shannon Waters.

*The more outstanding a natural
environment, the greater the
number of its potential uses, the
more heated is the debate about its
management.*

*This principle holds true in
Western Australia as much as in
Queensland's Daintree Forest
and Tasmania's Farmhouse Creek.*