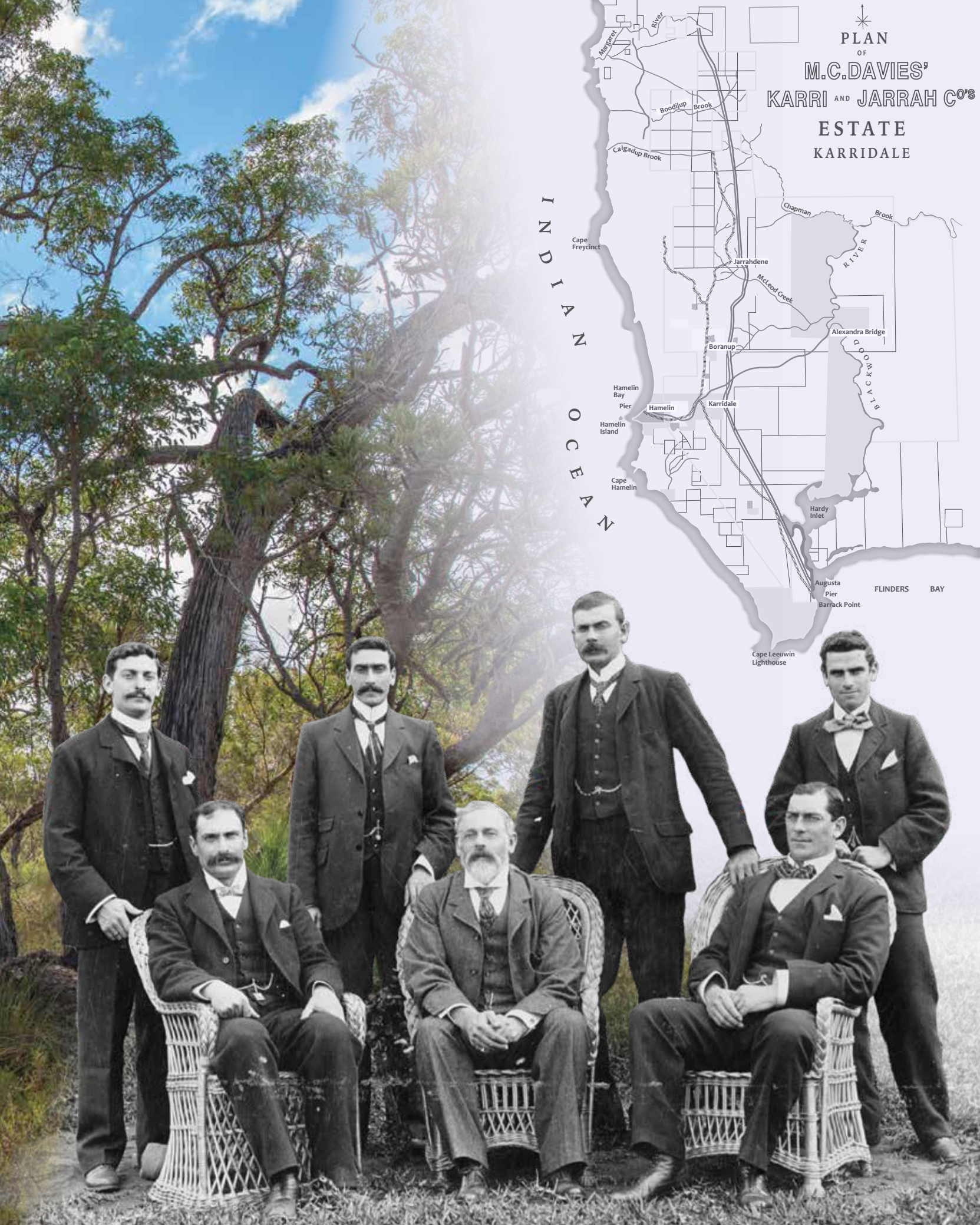
STEP BACK IN TIME: JARRAHDENE

by Lorna Charlton and Rhianna King

More than 120 years ago, Maurice Coleman Davies – an enterprising colonist – established a mill at Jarrahdene in what is now known as Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. For 18 years, the mill was a major centre of local employment, and the settlement was home to hundreds of men, women and children. Nowadays, the area is popular among campers, who travel there to enjoy a new campground in stunning natural surrounds, and the opportunity to get a glimpse at yesteryear.


PLAN
OF
M.C.DAVIES'
KARRI AND JARRAH Co's
ESTATE
KARRIDALE
INDIAN OCEAN
Margaret River
Boodijup Brook
Calgadup Brook
Cape Freycinct
Chapman Brook
Jarrahdene
McLeod Creek
RIVER
Alexandra Bridge
Boranup
BLACKWOOD
Hamelin Bay
Pier
Hamelin
Karridale
Hamelin Island
Cape Hamelin
Hardy Inlet
Augusta
Pier
Barrack Point
FLINDERS BAY
Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse

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Main The abundance of karri and jarrah in the south-west inspired Davies to open four mills in WA.
Photo – Jiri Lochman
Inset Maurice Coleman Davies and his six sons (left to right) Robert, Herbert, Walter, Arthur, Frank and Phillip.

Above Stacking timber at a mill in the south-west.

Left Timber workers standing next to a 'king karri'.
Photos – State Library of Western Australia

Born in London in 1835, Maurice Coleman Davies was four years old when he and his family set sail to begin their new life in Tasmania. Until his death at age 78, he made a profound impact across the sunburnt country he embraced as his home – from the farmlands of Tasmania to the goldfields of Victoria, through South Australia and to stations in Western Australia's far north-west. But, perhaps his most significant legacy was founding south-west WA's karri timber industry.

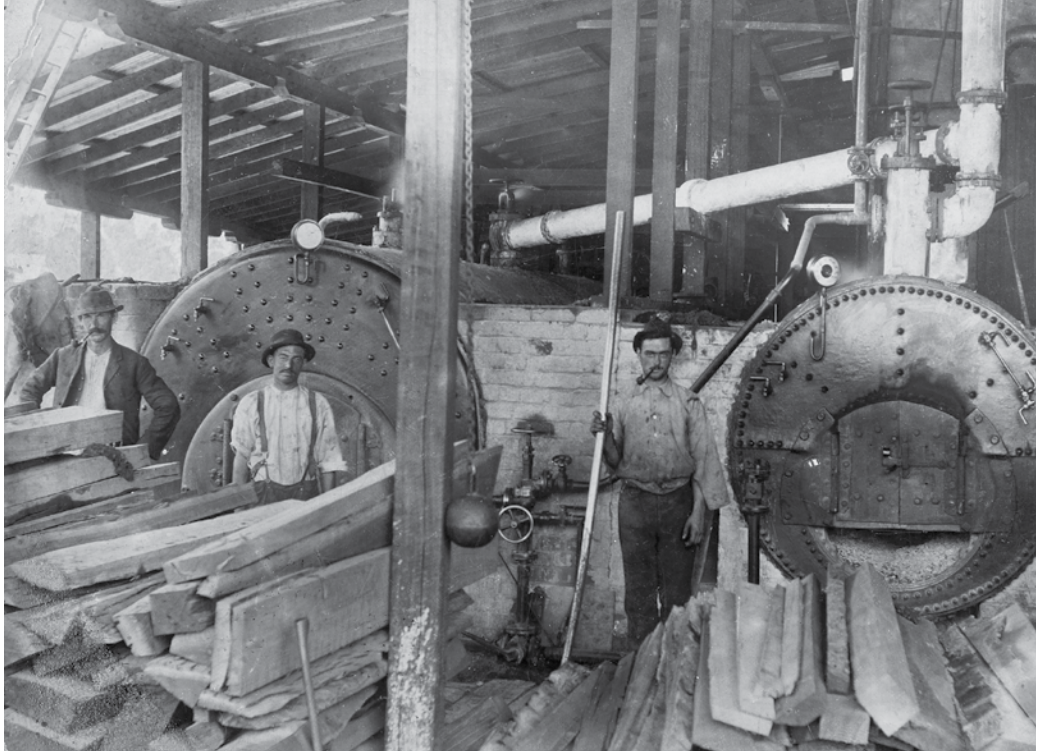
GROWTH OF A LEGACY

As a young man, Davies was lured to the Victorian goldfields where he worked on the diggings. He then established himself as a merchant in Melbourne and later in Adelaide, where he founded a firm that was involved in a number of key government and municipal public works projects in South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

In 1875, while he was involved in constructing a major part of the Melbourne to Adelaide railway line, Davies travelled to south-west WA to source the 14,000 cubic feet of timber needed to complete the job. While he was there, he recognised the abundance of hardwood, so returned the following year to purchase a large share of the Jarrahdale and Rockingham Timber Company – WA's first timber export company.

In 1878, Davies took out a Government lease for a large area of forest south of Margaret River, which was rich with tall karri trees. The largest karri tree on the Davies' estate, known as 'The Giant', stood 80 metres tall and had a girth of 10 metres and enough timber for 3000 railway sleepers. Until then, Western Australian hardwood timber was thought of as being jarrah. But Davies set to work proving that karri was more durable than jarrah, and introducing it to the global market as an alternative product.

Davies' first mill was constructed in 1881 at Coodardup (now Kudardup), which was serviced by jetties at Hamelin and Flinders bays. Then, in 1884 a new mill and head office was built at Karridale, which



"Between 1900 and 1914 approximately 17 million sleepers were cut from the Augusta-Margaret River region for railways in Australia and other parts of the world."

had capacity to process 12,000 superfeet (a unit of volume for timber equal to a board one foot square and one inch thick) per day. Davies also built a mansion at Karridale in 1885, where he lived with his wife, six sons and two daughters. He treated his workers like family and invested in community infrastructure such as a hospital, town hall, school, race course and a library. Davies developed a cashless society where workers had an account that they could use at the local store.

THE HEYDAYS

By 1891, Davies had commissioned a new mill at Boranup. Then, in 1895, when the local timber industry was booming and international demand for WA hardwoods was high, he opened his fourth mill at Jarrahdene. The new mill was the largest in the colony and capable of processing 21,000 superfeet of jarrah per day – twice the capacity of Davies' other mills.

At the height of operations, Davies was exporting more than 30 per cent of all the timber produced in WA. He was known to boast to his competitors that his timber had paved at least 200 streets in London. It was also used in the construction of buildings, bridges, mines, telegraph poles, wharves, jetties, piers, tramways and railways. The largest single shipment that Davies ever exported contained two million superfeet of jarrah and karri to Liverpool which, if cut into four-by-two-inch pieces and placed end to end, would have been enough to stretch in a straight line from Jarrahdene to Shark Bay.

Davies' timber empire continued to prosper and expand and by 1894, all six of his sons were involved in his business. In that year he constructed what became Bussell Highway and in 1895 he was also involved in the construction of the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse.

Journey to Jarrahdene Campground

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's '*LANDSCOPE*' playlist on YouTube.

Top left Drivers maintaining the boilers inside a timber mill.

Top A locomotive named after Davies' daughter 'Kate', hauling a rake of logs in 1889.

Above Felling a jarrah tree near Karridale in the 1900s.
Photos – State Library of Western Australia

Far left Davies was involved in constructing the Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse in 1895.
Photo – Marie Lochman

Above Interpretive signage and installations provide visitors with enriching experiences and stories from the mill.
Photo – DBCA

Left Camp sites at Jarrahdene have their own fire pit and picnic tables and other communal facilities such as barbecues and toilets.
Photo – Cliff Winfield

Between 1900 and 1914 approximately 17 million sleepers were cut from the Augusta-Margaret River region for railways in Australia and other parts of the world. However, Davies' company had begun to decline in 1900, due to competition, rising freight costs, dwindling timber reserves and the impact of the Boer War. Davies retired in 1902, leaving his sons in charge, and then passed away in 1913, within weeks of the Jarrahdene mill closing.

END OF THE LINE

After the mill closed, a number of the buildings and materials were removed and relocated, including the local store, which was moved to Augusta to become the town's first hall. By 1917, the mill and associated settlement was fully abandoned.

On Tuesday 9 November 1909, a writer for the *Bunbury Herald* recounted a train journey he took from Jarrahdene to Karridale:

> *"There is something rather melancholy about these deserted mill centres, where formerly were many full and happy homes, and bright attempts at settlement, are standing empty and mouldy buildings and weed-covered gardens. The very remoteness from civilisation makes the place even more gloomy and its loss more apparent. These once were cases of progress built into the limitless forest. Now all are but the ruins of man's achievement and are not even of service as shelters for the homeless."*

PHYSICAL LEGACY

More than 100 years on, there are still clues that Jarrahdene was once a timber mill; metal rails and bolts, the brickwork foundations for the boilers that powered the saws, and mounds and trenches suggest infrastructure, while broken crockery and other artefacts remind visitors that this was also home to the mill workers and their families.

The Jarrahdene mill site, which lies within Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, was given heritage status in 2012. The new $2.7 million Jarrahdene Campground sits adjacent to this historic site and provides 36 camp sites in three loops, and additional areas for large groups at 'The Siding' and 'The Landing'. All the sites are set 15 to 20 metres away from each other so visitors can enjoy a sense of space. Each site has its own fire pit and picnic table, and campers have access to communal barbecue shelters, toilets, untreated water and rubbish disposal.

An interpretive walk, including a section that is universally accessible, guides visitors around the old mill site. Signage tells stories of the area's history, and two large-scale installations give visitors a sense of the size and scale of the trees and mill operations that helped shape the area's history and that will continue to form the experiences of visitors well into the future.

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For more information about the Jarrahdene Campground, including camping fees and how to book online, visit exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park-stay.

Some of the information presented here first appeared in LANDSCOPE *in 1987, in an article written by Cliff Winfield called 'Maurice Coleman Davies: Timber Tycoon'.*