

Pinjarrah Park

Pinjarrah Park (Murray location 1) was a 10 000 acre grant originally held by F.D. Wickham, an absentee land owner. The grant remained undeveloped and eventually passed to his brother-in-law Lt Col William Fawcett, member of a well connected and respected military family.

In 1858 William's son, Theodore Fawcett (1832-1898), resigned his commission as Captain in the 6th Dragoon Guards and came to Western Australia to develop the grant. A small 2 room cottage (typical of the early colonial era houses then extant in the Murray District) was erected and clearing commenced. By early 1860 tenders were called for "for several miles of substantial two-rail fence at Pinjarrah Park".

Following the lead of previous settlers in the district, Fawcett planted a vineyard (Dom Pedro variety) on the upper lands and an orchard on the river flats below the cottage. Oranges were planted from pips obtained from a tree growing near Armadale and over the next 50 years would grow to great size. That Fawcett had an eye to the establishment of a pleasure garden at Pinjarrah Park is indicated by his importation in 1861 of the first Camellias into the colony.

At the beginning of 1863 Theodore Fawcett returned to England. It is assumed that the main homestead was already under construction by this time. In March of that year Fawcett's agent advertised for a gardener for Pinjarrah Park. The position was taken by John Witchell, who till his death 21 years later would tend the gardens and vines.

Theodore Fawcett returned to Western Australia in June of 1864 with his bride Eliza Audry Agnes Hill (1839-1918). Though coming from London society, Eliza proved to be the perfect partner in directing the running and development of Pinjarrah Park. On her death in 1918 she was described by a friend as;

...one of nature's noblewomen. Her life was one long endeavour to please others. [and she]...was one of the most widely (and best) read people I have met. Her numerous books were of the kind that helped to elucidate the problems of life, and she wasted little time on the modern trashy novel. She had studied other religions beside her own and her broad mindedness was displayed in the opinion expressed to me one day "that any religion would get one to Heaven, if only it were lived." One rarely talked to her without getting a new thought or an old idea decked out in such attractive garb that it seemed new; For example "No work degrades anyone, but what is degrading is to leave, one's work unfinished or improperly done."

Fawcett had been instrumental in the formation of the Pinjarra Mounted Volunteer Corps in 1862 and as its commander hosted the troop for inspection at gala days at Pinjarrah Park. The first of these occurred in 1864. Inspection and exercises were held on the expansive lawn at the front of the homestead. After luncheon in the homestead, guests strolled through the grounds admiring the gardens and played croquet on the lawn.

Ticket of leave convicts were used extensively to provide cheap labour on the estate, though this practice could lead to difficulties. In 1867 a disgruntled convict set fire to the haystacks in the yard close by the house. Luckily about 30 people who were at McLarty's on the other side of the river saw the flames and rushed to help. The fire was eventually put out (with the help of 50 hogsheads of wine thrown on the flames giving some idea of the productivity of the vineyard), but not before the majority of the outbuildings had been consumed. These were quickly rebuilt in brick and included a flour mill, cellars for wine production and quarters for workers on the estate.

In 1870 Pinjarrah Park received the first of many Vice Regal visits. Over the next 20 years the property would host most of the Governors of Western Australia and provide hospitality to many persons of note. Guests that were entertained from 1864 on include Thomas Peel, Bishop Hale, Colonel Bruce, Lady Barker, Neil McNeil, Catton Grasby and Edith Cowan.

In the early 1870s Fawcett began distilling Brandy at Pinjarrah Park. The property had been producing high quality wines for some ten years and the vineyard had grown to encompass some 40 acres. The distillation enterprise was expanded further to produce Eucalyptus Oil, which was considered to be superior to Bosisto's product.

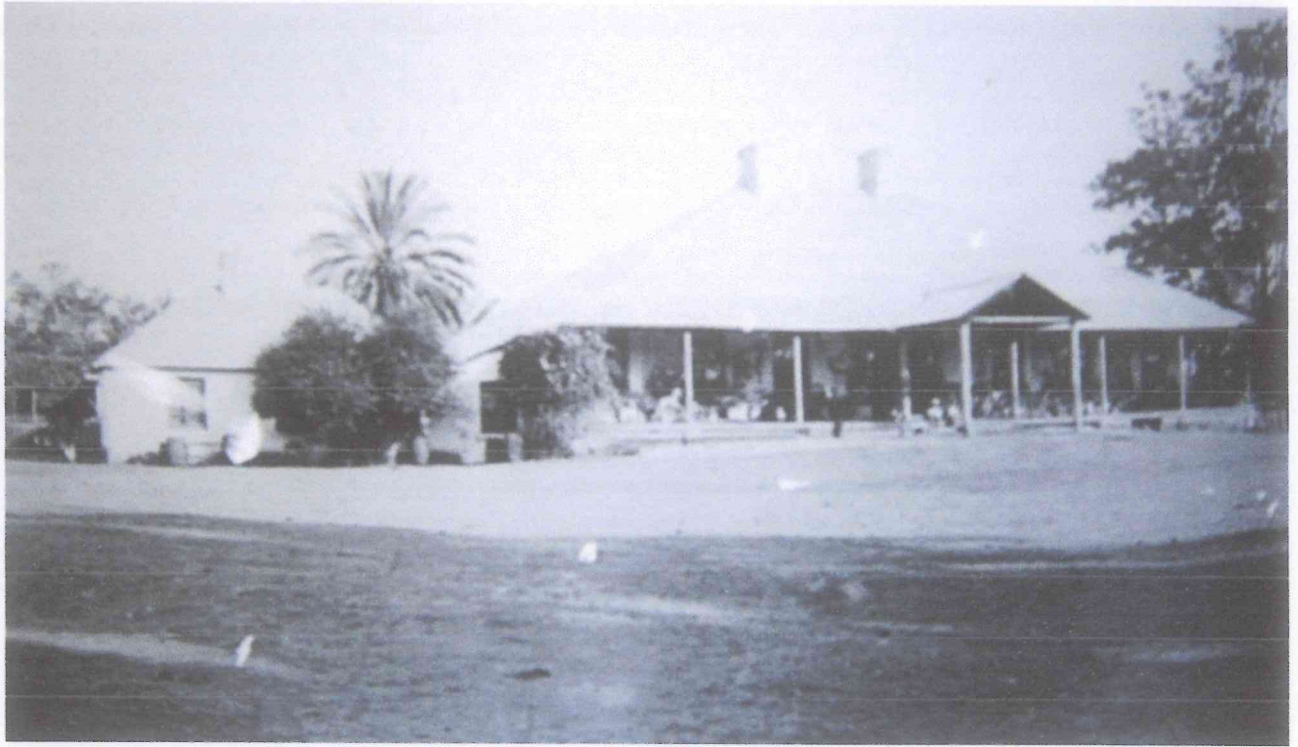
The 1890s saw Pinjarrah Park at its peak. The property hosted picnic trains on the newly opened southern line that ran past the homestead;

I shall not soon forget our too brief visit to Captain Fawcett's beautiful borne at Pinjarrah Park. We crowded into the most comfortable and tasteful house, we roamed about the beautiful orange and citron groves, and admired the enormous camelia trees, and lovely myrtle bushes, the latter reminding me of dear old England, whilst graceful date palms transported one to the tropics. We gazed at a distance at Captain Fawcett's extensive vineyard, from which he makes large quantities of wine and even distils his own brandy; and finally having inspected his ingenious irrigation devices we returned, laden with lemons and citrons, to the house, where we were received with charming courtesy by Mrs. Fawcett, and regaled with tea and choice refreshments. Once more on board the train on our return journey, we were merrier than ever, not a single mishap occurring to mar the enjoyment of a perfect day for which we shall ever be grateful to Mr. Neil McNeil.

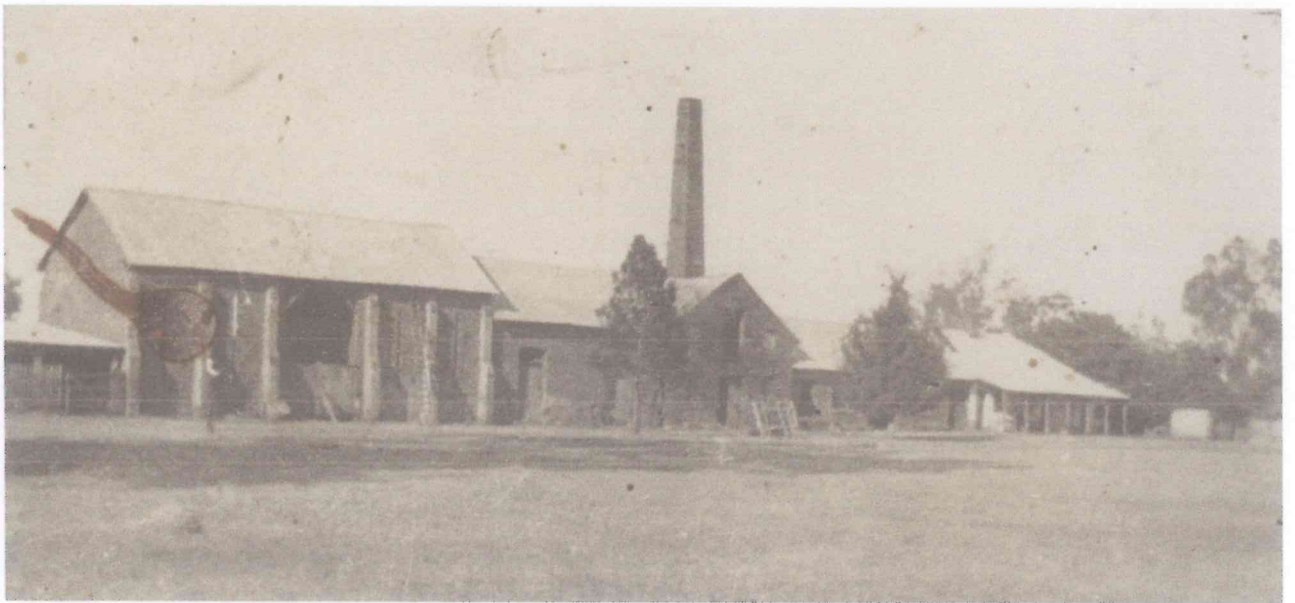
The orangery at Pinjarrah Park was considered the best in the colony and was applauded by horticultural experts and laymen alike. It was originally irrigated by a water wheel and flume but by the turn of the century a steam engine was employed to pump the water. The orchards were increased with plantings of Jonathon, Rome Beauty, Dunn Seedling and Adam's Pearmain apples. Other fruits grown on the property included cape gooseberrys, date palms, peaches, apricots and Japanese plums. Theodore and Eliza were active in the Vine and Fruit Growers Association and in 1890 Eliza was a founding member and President of the Murray Horticultural Society.

Theodore Fawcett died in 1898 and Eliza continued to run the property with the help of her son Ernest. The family decided to concentrate on the more fertile lands they owned at Marradong and much of the outlying acres of Pinjarrah Park were sold. By the second decade of the twentieth century wine production had ceased and the vineyard was grubbed out. The outbuildings were allowed to decay and many of the orchard trees were removed. On the death of Eliza the property was inherited by her daughters Agnes and Eva who lived there with their niece Charlotte. The garden lost a number of features at this time (the fruit trees and Date Palms at the rear of the house) and gained others (Rose beds by the carriage drive, Wisteria trellis on the front verandah and mixed garden in front of the cottage). The verandah deck on the house was rebuilt in the 1950s, the subfloor space was bricked in cutting off light from the windows into the cellars. It is thought that the ground level around the verandah was raised significantly at this time.

Pinjarrah Park passed out of the hands of the Fawcett family in the first decade of the 21st century. The property now consists of some 500 acres is currently run as a caravan park.



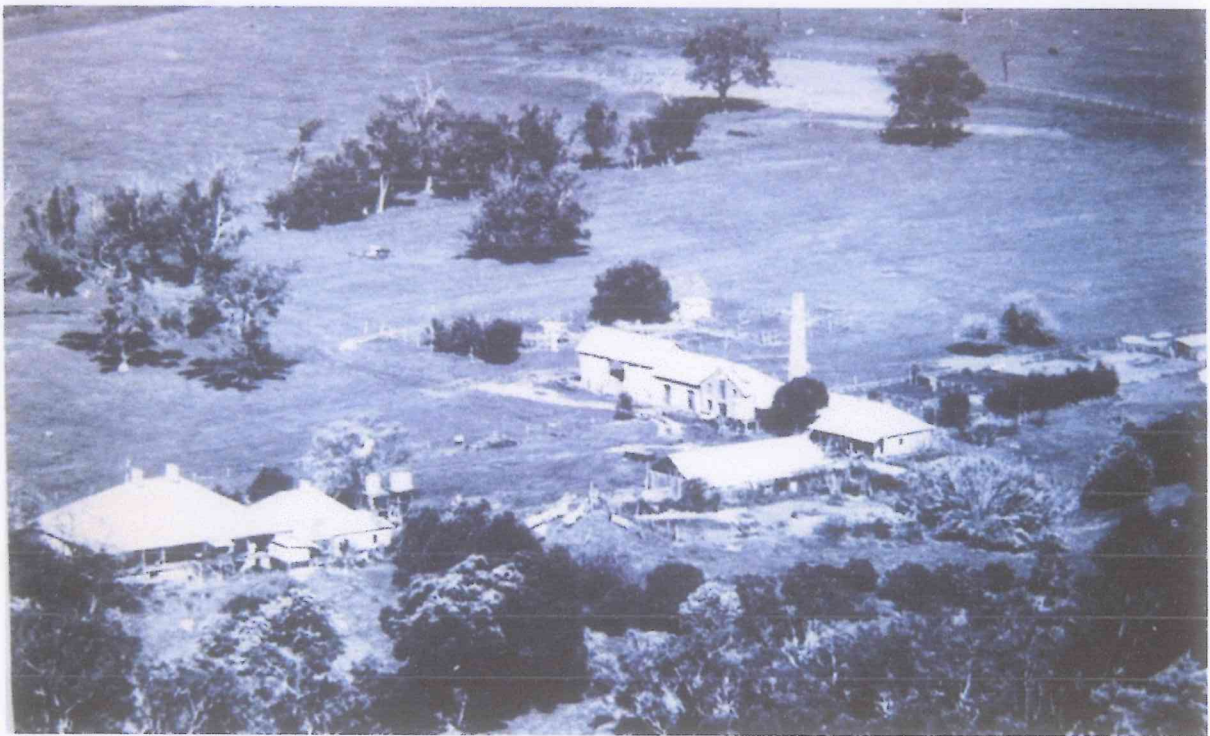
Pinjarrah Park c. 1910.



Pinjarrah Park Mill and quarters.



Pinjarrah Park c. 1970.



Pinjarrah Park c. 1952.