The main characters in the events at Pinjarra include:

- **James Stirling** – Governor of the Swan River Colony
- **Captain T. Ellis** – Superintendent of Native Tribes
- **Captain R. G. Meares** – Superintendent of Police in Guildford
- **John Septimus Roe** (Mr Roe) – Surveyor General
- **Thomas Peel** – Colonist in the Murray River area.
- **Hugh Nesbit (or Nisbett)** – servant who was murdered by Murray River Aborigines in July 1834

The accounts of the incident are from both European and Aboriginal eyewitnesses.

Lieutenant-Governor James Stirling wrote in a letter to the Colonial Secretary:

> When Ellis saw the Murray tribe he recognised several of them, to be those who were present at Nisbett's murder, and amounting in all to about 60 or 70. He accordingly made a signal to me, and advanced towards them. The natives stood their ground, as I am informed, and threw spears, by which Captain Ellis was wounded in the head, and one of his men in the right arm, and another was unhorsed, stunned, and dismounted by the blow, and having his horse speared. Captain Ellis’s party was thus put into great danger, but at this critical moment, the men with me got into position, and commenced firing, and threw the natives into confusion, they fled to a [river crossing] about 100 yards, below the other, but being headed then, by the Corporal's party, they were forced back into the bed of the stream.

Stirling continued in his letter:

> The upper ford (river crossing) being also occupied by Mr Roe, as well as the two banks they were completely surrounded and overpowered, the number [of Aborigines] killed amounted probably to 15 men. The women were kept, until after our company had been collected round the two wounded men, they were then informed that the punishment had been inflicted, because of the misconduct of the tribe, that the white men, never forgot to punish murder, that on this occasion the women and children had been spared...

Captain John Septimus Roe wrote the following in his Field book on 28th October 1834:

> In a few minutes the loud shouting and yelling of the natives told us the whites were discovered; and firing immediately commenced on the left bank [of the Murray River]. Not having a gun, I was directed to take charge of the ford [crossing] with the baggage and four soldiers, while the remainder of the force followed the Governor ... - the firing continued and followed the retreating voices of the natives for upwards of an hour. This
is explained as follows - on the approach of the police towards the natives, they started up from their fires, about 70 or 80 in number and began retreating. So soon however, as it was ascertained that they were the ... tribe [who killed Nisbett], the firing commenced at a full charge, in which the chief, Capt Ellis was wounded in the [head] and knocked off his horse by a spear... The same native wounded one of the police (P. Heffron) in the right arm, so as to completely disable him. The native was however, almost instantly shot dead.

Captain John Septimus Roe continued:

After the first charge which killed four or five, the natives retreated to the river, intending apparently to cross over by another ford about half a mile lower down – [here they met] the remainder of the armed force headed by the Governor [Stirling], just as part of them were [climbing] the bank - they took to hiding themselves among the bushes and dead logs of the river banks, and were picked off by the party on either shore.... the natives, who... in many instances had immersed themselves in water, having only their nose and mouth above water, nevertheless threw numerous spears with amazing precision and force. In this way, between 15 and 20 were shot dead, very few wounded being suffered to escape.

Noongar oral accounts handed down over the generations describe a planned ambush or massacre.

The initiated men [of the tribe] were camped at the Peel inlet, carrying out initiation rituals with some of the older boys [and] those attacked at Pinjarra were women and children camped near a woman’s ceremonial area, only protected by a small number of males.... Stirling’s men were conscious of this and therefore fled the area quickly after the massacre, anticipating that the warriors would soon discover what had occurred and [follow] them.

(Statham – Drew, p 267)

As a child survivor of the Pinjarra Massacre, George Winjan, recalled:

They rush camp, they shoot-em man, shoot-em gins, shoot-em picaninnies and they shoot-em dogs too.

Full versions of these accounts are found at:

http://www.pinjarramassacresite.com/content/witnesses/

The impact of the clash at Pinjarra can be seen at:

http://www.westaustalianvista.com/pinjarra-massacre.html