

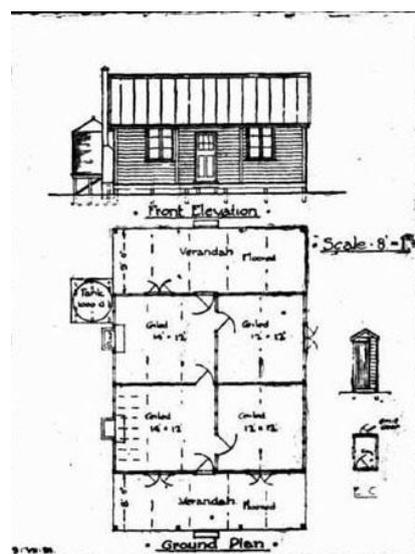
Centenary flashback: Settlers housing in the 1920s

In 1921, Western Australia embarked on a group settlement scheme which saw 6,000 British families migrate to Western Australia to become farmers. The scheme aimed to increase Australia's population after World War I and decrease the reliance on imported agricultural goods.

Each settlers group was made up of up to 20 families who were placed on 160 acre blocks which they cleared in return for 10 shillings a day. After the land was cleared, families were allocated their own area to farm.

The Department, then called the Workers' Homes Board, built houses for many of these settlers farms. The houses were 'Type 7' timber cottages which consisted of three bedrooms and a kitchen/living area. Most had a rain tank, an out-house toilet and no electricity.

The cottages represented low-cost dwellings typical of the 1920s and 1930s inter-war period in Western Australia.



Type 7 settlers cottage, 1920s. Photo courtesy of State Library Western Australia 001512D

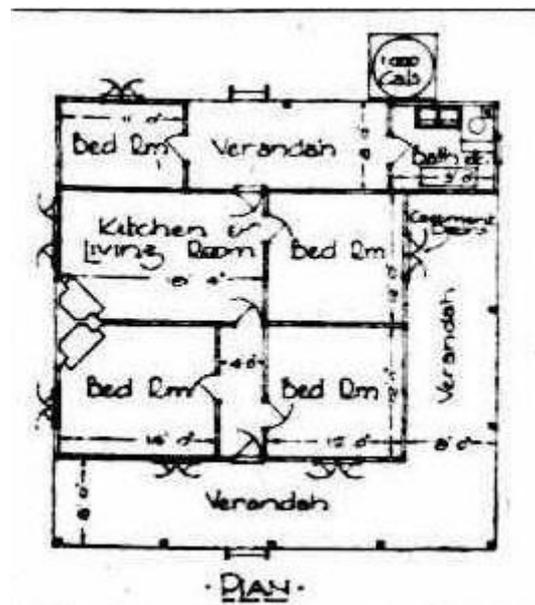
By 1927, many of the settlers farms had been abandoned due to isolation and financial hardships caused by inadequate government planning and support and lack of reliable transport of their goods to the city.

In 1930, the scheme was dismantled and labelled a 'glorious failure'.

As a result of the failed scheme, the Workers' Homes Board was faced with the issue of hundreds of relatively new cottages being abandoned across regional Western Australia in areas such as Manjimup, Busselton, Augusta and Denmark.

In 1931, the Board began dismantling, removing, re-erecting and enlarging the cottages to sell to workers on leasehold land.

"The purchaser gets the home for about £50 or £60 less than he would if he paid for the erection of a new building, and, in addition, the Group Settlement Branch, which is paid for the cottages by the Workers' Homes Board, is saved the loss which would ensue if the building was left on an abandoned block," reported The West Australian, 25th July 1931.



*An example of a type 7 settlers cottage being extended for re-sale.
Additions include a bathroom and additional bedroom.*

At around the same time the regional settlers cottages were being relocated, the first metropolitan settlers group was established at Herdsman Lake, at the request of the Lands Department.

The Board built 40 identical type 7 cottages on the fringe of the lake, which had been drained in the 1920s to become agricultural land. Settlers attempted to grow vegetables such as potatoes, peas, onions and cabbages on the land.



A family arriving to live at Herdsman Lake, 1931

In 1931, the Minister of Lands was impressed with the settlement's progress.

"The Minister expressed the opinion that the proposition offered by the government was one of the finest for a working man that had ever come under notice, and he was surprised that more people were not applying for the cottages at present available," reported *The West Australian*, 12th March 1931.

This opinion expressed by the Minister greatly contradicted the reality of the settlement. The Board found it extremely difficult to occupy the cottages. Once occupied, many settlers were forced to leave soon after due to infertile, salty soils and the economic hardships of the Great Depression.

Today, only one of the cottages remains and is heritage listed. It is currently leased by Artsource through the Heritage Council.



The last remaining Herdsman Lake cottage still standing today.