



# REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

## 11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

### 11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

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### 11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* is physical evidence of an important government land settlement scheme of the inter-war years. (Criterion 2.1)

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* demonstrates an important phase in the evolution of development associated with Herdsman Lake and demonstrates the changing status of the locality between the 1930s and the 1990s. (Criterion 2.2)

The building is important as evidence of government designed workers' housing and lifestyles in Western Australia in the 1930s and early post-World War Two period. (Criterion 2.2)

The drain has significance as the location of the original outlet drain from the drainage scheme undertaken by the Catholic Church, in 1883, which was later incorporated in the 1920s Public Works Department scheme. (Criterion 2.2)

### 11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The cottage and its setting has scientific value as a demonstration of the living standards of a low socio-economic group, and as a benchmark of the minimum standards of housing considered acceptable by the state government, during the 1930s. (Criterion 3.1)

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* has the potential to be used as an educational facility for the study of a variety of topics relevant to the history and development of the lake and immediate locality. These areas of interest include: the Herdsman Lake soils; timber housing construction and its use in Western Australia in the inter-war years; local social history; the history of engineering technology relating to the draining and reclamation of the lake and the surrounding areas; and the present use of the lake as a compensating basin. (Criterion 3.2)

*Herdsmen Lake Settlers Cottage* has the potential to be used to demonstrate principles and approaches to heritage conservation and to demonstrate timber conservation technology. (Criterion 3.3)

#### **11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE**

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* has value for its associations with those individuals, and their descendants, who were part of the community of Herdsman Lake settlers. (Criterion 4.1)

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* serves as a reminder, in the wider community, of a period of economic hardship, which has had a lasting impact on Western Australia and Australia. (Criterion 4.1)

### **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **12. 1. RARITY**

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* is the only remaining intact example of the forty agricultural lots, with identical timber cottages, which were offered for selection on Herdsman Lake in the government sponsored 1930s land settlement scheme. (Criterion 5.1)

The cottage is unique as an example of the Herdsman Lake cottages and is also rare in the metropolitan area as an example of typical group settlement housing which was largely constructed predominantly in rural areas. (Criterion 5.2)

#### **12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage* is representative of government sponsored semi-rural settlements in the inter-war years, which have now become part of the Perth metropolitan area. (Criterion 6.2)

The site, and the lake as a whole, is representative of the longstanding practice in Western Australia of draining the natural wetlands on the coastal plain in order to convert them to productive use. (Criterion 6.2)

The cottage is representative of typical low-cost housing provided by the Workers' Homes Board, during the 1920s and 1930s. The Type 7 cottage used at Herdsman Lake, was widely used for settlers in country areas under the immigrant group settlement and soldier settlement schemes. (Criterion 6.2)

#### **12. 3 CONDITION**

The overall condition of the building interior and exterior is sound. Some internal linings and external materials including: timbers, roof sheets and weatherboards require maintenance to prevent further deterioration.

#### **12. 4 INTEGRITY**

The cottage is structurally intact; however, modifications to the interior and addition of facilities to the rear of the building fabric occurred after 1960. Generally, the modifications are considered to be of poor quality and detract from the integrity. The building therefore, has a modest degree of integrity.

#### **12. 5 AUTHENTICITY**

Many alterations and additions were made to the building after 1960 which detract from the building as a reflection of the period of settlement. As the building is structurally intact, and the alterations considered reversible, the building retains a moderate degree of authenticity.

### **13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

Supporting evidence has been supplied by an external consultant.

#### **13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

The Settlers Cottage on Lot 43, (originally Lot 54) 180 Pearson Street, is the last remaining of the forty identical cottages built on the perimeter of Herdsman Lake, in the early 1930s, under a combined project by the Department of Lands and Surveys and the Workers' Homes Board.

In 1920, the 1,073 acres (433 ha) of swamp land which constituted Herdsman Lake was acquired by the State Government from the previous owner, the Roman Catholic Church, for the purpose of developing the area as an intensive agricultural area.

The Government's plan was to develop the lake bed as agricultural lots allied with residential lots to be situated on the fringes of the lake. Prior to subdivision, the Government undertook an extensive scheme to drain the lake including the construction of a tunnel designed to drain water from the lake westward through the City of Perth Endowment Lands and into the ocean near Floreat Beach, a distance of some 3.5 kilometres.

Work commenced on the Herdsman Lake Tunnel in 1921. The drainage scheme included a system of subsidiary drains and locks connected with the main Osborne Park drain. During the 1920s, the government invested £150,000 in the area.

In 1928, the lake was subdivided into thirty eight agricultural lots, each allied with a residential lot on higher ground on the western side of the lake, for selection. The scheme was a failure. Only six lots were sold, of which three were forfeited within five years.

The need to recoup some of the Government's expenditure on the drainage of the lake led to a second attempt at subdivision. After the failure of the 1928 subdivision, the decision was taken to facilitate settlement by constructing cottages on the new subdivision before the reopening of the land for selection, in November 1930. The recast subdivision created lots along the perimeter of the lake, each including higher land along the margins suitable for the construction of houses.

Herdsman Lake had been purchased under the Agricultural Lands Purchase Act for closer settlement, and although not settled strictly under the operation of the Act, the land was subject to the general conditions covering agricultural improvements. The need for the Department of Lands and Surveys to supervise the conditions of purchase of the lots and concern that splitting the bulk of the lot from the house site might result in settlers selling their houses and returning the agricultural component to the Department of Lands and Surveys led to the establishment of a unique arrangement with the Workers' Homes Board. The Board agreed to act in an advisory capacity regarding both expenditure and construction

of the cottages and administration of their eventual purchase by the settlers.

During the construction phase, the Workers' Homes Board administered the building contracts for the cottages on behalf of the Department of Lands and Surveys. On completion, settlers' payments for the cottages were calculated on the same basis as cottages built under the Workers' Homes Act and made concurrent with payments for the land. The Workers' Homes Board kept the accounts and advised on the condition of the cottages for the Department of Lands and Surveys for an annual fee of £30 until 1942. The landlord responsible for supervising the land improvements and generally overseeing living conditions at the lake, was the Under Secretary of the Department of Lands and Surveys.

Cottages were erected on the Herdsman Lake lots in late 1930 and early 1931 in accordance with two building contracts, each for the construction of twenty identical cottages. The cottage chosen was a Workers' Homes Board Type 7 'settlers cottage'. The cottage was timber framed with jarrah weatherboarding to external walls. Simple in plan, with four interconnecting rooms and a verandah front and back, it was the most economical cottage design available, and was considered to provide a good basic level of accommodation. Elsewhere, the cottages had been built with corrugated galvanised iron roofs; however, the decision was made to use corrugated asbestos cement sheeting for the cottages at Herdsman Lake. The decision involved an additional cost of £9 per cottage, but this was considered to be offset by the benefit of providing three weeks work in the factory for twelve previously unemployed men.

The cost of a completed cottage to a settler was £260 which was combined with the cost of the land, at £70 per acre, to provide a complete house and land package. Conditions of sale were that the purchase price, with interest at 6.5% per annum, was payable by fortnightly instalments over a period of 30 years. Lot 54, covering an area of just over seven acres, was priced at £760/14/5 including the cottage valued at £260. The fortnightly repayment, over thirty years, was set at £2/5/11. Lessees were required to enter into personal occupation of the land immediately upon receipt of approval, and to reside continuously in the house which had to be kept in good condition and repair. Fencing of boundaries within two years of purchase was required and within one year lessees were to have one-tenth of the area cultivated as a bona fide vegetable garden. This proportion to rise to one-fourth within three years. Failure to comply with the conditions rendered the lessee liable to forfeiture, together with all moneys paid to that time.

In contrast to the previous attempt to release land in November 1928, interest in the recast subdivisions was immediately encouraging and, although lots were readvertised, all were eventually taken up. Many of the prospective gardeners were former country dwellers who were attracted by the house and land package and the prospect of fertile land close to the Perth market. Some lots were taken up by ex-servicemen who saw a future in vegetable farming in what appeared to be propitious circumstances, these returned men were later given a slight reduction in the interest rate on their loans.

The release of land was not intended to provide relief to the growing numbers of unemployed. Concern was expressed by members of an unemployment deputation who were received by the Premier in 1930, that an unemployed person could not afford the deposit. The response from the Under Secretary for Lands was that it was essential for the Crown to receive a return for the expenditure incurred.

The settlers faced considerable difficulties from the beginning due mainly to the poor condition of the soil. The only successful crop was sweet potatoes.

As early as 1931, the Workers' Homes Board, which administered the properties, noted that the Herdsman Lake Settlers were having difficulties paying instalments. Faced with mounting debts and settler representations, the Government was finally moved, two years later, to appoint a board to consider the reclassification of existing Herdsman Lake holdings. The board's final report to the Under Secretary for Lands, presented in July 1935, was based upon close inspection of the lake, consideration of soil reports and the opinions of each settler upon soil quality and their difficulties in working the land.

The board's findings were that the Herdsman Lake soils were unsuitable for market gardening and that it was not possible for a family to earn a living on the original subdivisions of five to nine acres. Consequently, the lots should be regarded as residential sites and revalued accordingly, their recommended reduction from the original price of £70 per acre being between £10/10/- and £20. In December 1935, Cabinet agreed to the revaluation of the existing holdings on the basis of the board's report and withdrew other lots from selection.

Nevertheless, the revaluations did not, in many cases, provide much relief for settlers who still struggled to meet the reduced repayments. Representations were made by the Settlers' Association for further reductions in valuations in March 1936 and again two years later. Herdsman Lake accounts were finally transferred from the Workers' Homes Board to the Lands Department in July 1942, with a total liability calculated at £11,057/01/07.

Lot 54 was put up for selection in March 1931. The cottage was the last in the second batch of twenty, built under the settlement scheme, and was part of the building contract which foundered when the contractor was declared bankrupt.

The first two applicants for lot 54 had a change of mind about taking up the property and it was eventually allotted to two men, named McIver and Timps. Their tenure was short lived and a contract was finally settled with the first long term occupier, Frederick John Scott Hatcher, on 29 May, 1933. By the time Frederick Hatcher signed the agreement, the total cost of the house and land had risen to £929/17/03, the additional surprisingly large sum of £170, no doubt being the value of improvements, such as fencing and clearing, undertaken by the first occupants. With the revaluation of the properties in 1935, which followed the investigation of the agricultural worth of the soils, the value of the land on lot 54 which had originally been priced at £70 per acre, was downgraded to £15 per acre, a reduction of

almost eighty percent. Many left their properties, but Frederick Hatcher remained at his cottage until his death in July 1960, and the property was sold in July of the following year, to two brothers, Giovanni and Angelo Gava.

The Gava brothers, who were already established settlers on the lake, did not reside on the property. They had purchased the land for market gardening and apparently had some success growing crops of sweet potatoes and pumpkins. The Gava brothers added a produce shed and several stables to the existing out-buildings and leased both the cottage and stables to tenants.

The cottage remained in the Gava family until 1991, when it was purchased by the government.

### **13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE**

The cottage on lot 43 (originally lot 54) was the most northerly of the forty cottages constructed in 1930/31, and is representative as the last remnant of the 1930 subdivision and associated housing development.

The settlers cottages at Herdsman Lake were simple in design and basic in the quality of accommodation provided. Workers' Homes Board Type 7 cottages had been used extensively by the Department of Lands and Surveys for settlers under the Group Settlement Scheme in country areas during the 1920s. They were therefore considered suitable for settlers taking up small holdings of agricultural land close to Perth.

The cottages were located on the outer edge of the allotments, on higher ground away from the swampy edges of the lake and close to Herdsman Parade which provided a boundary road to the entire subdivision. (Part of the road was renamed Pearson Street in the early 1950s.) The forty cottages were identical - the last remaining, on lot 54, giving an insight into the level of accommodation provided, construction methods and materials used.

The cottages consisted of four interconnecting rooms with verandahs front and back, both of which had floors but were not enclosed. Accommodation comprised a front living room, kitchen and two bedrooms. Construction was timber frame on stump footings, with jarrah weatherboarding to external walls and corrugated asbestos roofing. External walls were lined internally in the front living room and internal partitions were lined to one side. Lining was of tongue and groove vertical jarrah dado height of 4 ft 6 ins (1.37 m) and Ceilyte (a fibrous plaster panel) above. All ceilings were lined with Ceilyte. Timber framing and external weatherboards were left exposed in the bedrooms and kitchen. The cottages had jarrah floor boards throughout. Originally, there were no flyscreens provided for the windows.

A rain water tank with a tap was located at the side of the cottage. Each cottage had a Metters No. 2 wood stove for cooking. There was no electricity and initially lighting was by kerosene lamp. A brick fireplace was built into the corner of the front living room for heating. There was no bathroom or wash-house. An outside water closet was provided some distance from the cottage.

The cottages built at Herdsman Lake had their origins in the design of accommodation for country settlers after the First World War. In 1922, the then Premier and Colonial Treasurer, Sir James Mitchell, introduced by Act of Parliament a special policy designed to improve the accommodation of rural workers following complaints that there was no suitable accommodation for the families of married men in country centres. The work was undertaken by the Workers' Homes Board with the objectives of providing 'reasonable accommodation for a country cottage' for 'as moderate a monthly repayment instalment as could be arranged'.

Designs for two four-roomed, timber framed cottages were produced - each with a rainwater tank to supply running water. These two basic designs were known as Type 2 and Type 3 Workers' Homes Board cottages.

The Type 7 Workers' Homes Board cottage, the type provided for the settlers of Herdsman Lake, was developed as an improved version of the Type 3 in the late 1920s. Identical in floor plan, the Type 7 had all ceilings lined with Ceilyte and partitions lined on one side only with jarrah panelling to dado height and the balance Ceilyte. They also had brick chimneys and a floor to the back verandah. Type 7 cottages were also used extensively in Group Settlement areas.

The basic four roomed timber cottage introduced in 1922, was provided by the Workers' Homes Board until the late 1930s. By the early 1940s, modifications and extensions to the basic design had significantly increased the comfort level of the simplest timber cottages. However, the settlers cottage at Herdsman Lake is an example of the basic level of comfort considered acceptable at the period.

The remaining cottage on lot 54, exhibits many original features. The cottage underwent alterations and additions by the Gava brothers who had purchased the land for market gardening in 1961. One of the tenants was responsible for 'improvements' and embellishments to the cottage including, the removal of the internal wall and doorway between the kitchen and living room - part of the wall framing remains intact, as does the fireplace and chimney; and the upgrading of the bathroom. The out-buildings were in a state of disrepair when the property was purchased by the government, and were demolished in early 1992.

Since the 1960s, other modifications were made including an additional brick hearth roughly constructed in the kitchen and a north facing window built into the living room wall. The rear verandah was enclosed with asbestos cement sheeting and lined with plasterboard to provide a sleepout. The verandah was also been extended to provide basic bathroom and laundry facilities. Other various accretions included solar panels, a television cupboard, a ventilation unit and areas of rough brickwork in the kitchen. Polished jarrah panelling remains in the front room although all internal walls are now fully lined. The remaining doors and windows are original and the concrete hearth for the wood stove is still discernible, as is the asbestos cement-lined recess in the rear wall of the cottage.

In 1995 the cottage was relocated eastwards on the site and reinstated 75m from its original site, in order to clear the proposed Stephenson Highway

road reservation alignment. Basic power and water services have been reinstated and the chimney and fireplace area built to match the original.

### **13.3 REFERENCES**

Heritage and Conservation Professionals: 'Conservation Study Herdsman Lake Settlers Cottage Western Australia' (prepared for the Department of Planning and Urban Development, September, 1992)