Cockman House
TEACHER RESOURCE

City of Wanneroo



Wanneroo Heritage Education

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All historic photographs used are courtesy of the Wanneroo Regional Museum and Community History Centre.
They can be found here by searching for key words such as Cockman House.

Please note that all links in this document were checked at time of publication, however we have no control over any changes that may be made to the referenced webpages.





Introduction

This teacher resource provides additional information along with West Australian Curriculum linked activity suggestions. It can be used to build on the Cockman House excursion experience, or as part of a virtual excursion using the video link below.

The resource kit has been divided into seven themes with activity suggestions at the end of the document.

Themes:

- The Cockman family
- Cockman House
- Family structure
- The Role of children
- Market gardening
- Technology
- Heritage



In addition to this resource, you can view the Cockman House incursion video here.
This is recommended to watch after visiting Cockman House to consolidate learnings, or if you are not able to visit the house.

Further Information

If you require any further information or would like to discuss excursion details, please contact:
Heritage Education Phone (08) 9405 5920
Email: museum@wanneroo.wa.gov.au
Post: City of Wanneroo, Locked Bag 1 Wanneroo WA 6946

Curriculum Links and Inquiry Questions

Year 1 - Present and past family life

The diverse structures and sizes of families, the familial roles today and how these have changed or remained the same over time.

How the present, past and future are represented by terms indicating time as well as by dates and changes that may have personal significance

The differences and similarities between children's daily lives and life during their parents' and grandparents' childhoods and how daily lives have changed.

Key inquiry questions

How has family life changed or remained the same over time?
What has stayed the same, and what has changed in children's daily lives over time?
How do we show the sequence of time?

Year 2 - The past in the present

The history of a significant person, building, site or part of the natural environment in the local community and what it reveals about the past.

The importance today of a historical site or place and why it has heritage significance and cultural values for present generations.

The impact of changing technology on people's lives and how the technology of the past differs from the technology used today.

Key inquiry questions

Why are some people, buildings, or places important to our community?
How has technology changed the way people live and work?
What technologies did people use in the past, and how are they different from those we use today?
How does learning about the past help us understand our community today?

Year 3 Communities and remembrance

One important example of change and one important example of continuity over time in the local community, region or state/territory.

The role that different cultural groups have played in the development and character of the local community compared with development in another community.

Key inquiry questions

How has our community changed over time?
What has stayed the same in our community, and why?
Why is it important to remember people, events, and traditions from the past?

Curriculum links as per WA School Curriculum and Standards Authority HASS curriculum to be implemented in 2026 which can be found here.

Additional Resources

Picture Wanneroo
Collections WA
Wanneroo Museum Videos

The Cockman Family

James and Mary Ann Cockman

James Cockman and his wife Mary Ann Roper immigrated from England to Western Australia to be part of the new Swan River Colony in 1829.

James arrived on the HMS *Calista* which took around six months to travel from England to Australia via ship. James had been contracted as an indentured servant which meant his employer paid for his journey to Australia, and food and accommodation. Once James arrived in Australia he had to work for his employer, Mr George Leake, to repay this debt.

Mary Ann Roper travelled to Australia with her brother on board the *Atwick* which arrived in Fremantle in 1829. She worked as a servant to the Waddell family. She would do tasks such as cooking, cleaning and looking after their children.



James and Mary Ann Cockman



James Samuel and Emma Cockman

James and Mary Ann's Wedding

James met Mary Ann married in March 1830. Their wedding was recorded as the first Anglican marriage and the third marriage to happen in the colony.

Cockman House was home to three generations of the Cockman family. James and Mary Ann Cockman raised seven children there before the property passed to their youngest son, James Samuel Cockman. He and his wife, Emma, made the house their family home, raising 13 children. The property was later inherited by their youngest daughter, Ruby Cockman, who married Albert Backshall. Together they had six children, and their youngest son, Charles Backshall, became the final family member to live in the house. He remained there until 1987, when the property was sold to the City of Wanneroo and converted into a museum.

James and Mary Ann's marriage certificate from 1830

(Section 3 - The third ever marriage in the Swan River Colony)

Marriages Solemnized at Perth in Western Austr.

1 James Knight of Perth aged 22 Single man
& Mary Anne Smith of Perth aged 21 Single woman
were married by Banns this Eighteenth day of January
1830 – By me. Signed, J.H. Scott A.M.
Rector of Whitfield.
Dioc of Durham.
This marriage was } Signed. James Knight
Solemnized between us } " Mary Ann Smith
Witness,
Signed, P. Brown Secretary to Government
" Sarah Blake of Perth

2 I certify that George Eyre and Catherine Bamber
were married by Special licence from the Lt Governor of
this Colony, on Saturday March 13th 1830.
Signed
R. R. Davies
Fremantle
Western Australia

3 James Cockerman late of the Parish of South Mims
in the County of Middlesex England, & Mary Ann
Rossiter of the Parish of Plymouth, England were married
by Banns at Fremantle Swan River this 15th day of
March 1830 by me :-
Signed,
B. Williamson
Chaplain

Building Cockman House

The story of Cockman House began in 1841. James Cockman made an agreement with wealthy landowner George Shenton, who owned a lot of land in the north of Perth called the Lakes District. James agreed to work for George Shenton in return for the chance to build a home and later buy land. Although his wife, Mary Ann, was worried about the isolated area, James built a small wattle and daub house and when it was finished in 1851, the family moved there. James and Mary Ann were the first European settlers to live in the area.

In 1853, they saved £100 to buy 45 acres of land in Wanneroo and James set about building a more substantial house. With the help of his son John, they quarried the limestone for the walls as well as burning limestone to make lime mortar (old fashioned cement). James had already built saw pits for Mr Shenton, including one near his new home site. He used the saw pit to prepare the timber for the house, including the rafters, doors, windows and wide floorboards. This was the family's first home with wooden floors. The roof was originally made from wooden shingles from sheoak, split and cut into shape with a broad bladed axe. The house was completed in 1860.

Over the years and generations of the Cockman family, additions have been made to the house to accommodate the growing size of the family. It is the oldest remaining house in Wanneroo.



Family Structure

The family structure at Cockman House was typical of farming families of the time. The father was considered the head of the household. His role was to provide food, water, shelter and clothing and run the farm. The women of the family provided all of the domestic and child raising duties and assisted in the farm work as well. Cleaning the laundry was a big job for the women, Monday was usually the official wash day, and the ironing took up most of Tuesday.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, extended families were common, with grandparents living in the home as there were no retirement or aged care services. Families were expected to care for older relatives.

At Cockman House, two women fulfilled the role of “Granny”: Mary Ann Cockman and later her daughter Emma Cockman. They provided guidance and education for the children and helped with domestic work. Due to the small size of the house and large family, Granny shared her bed with the older girls so there was enough space for the younger children.

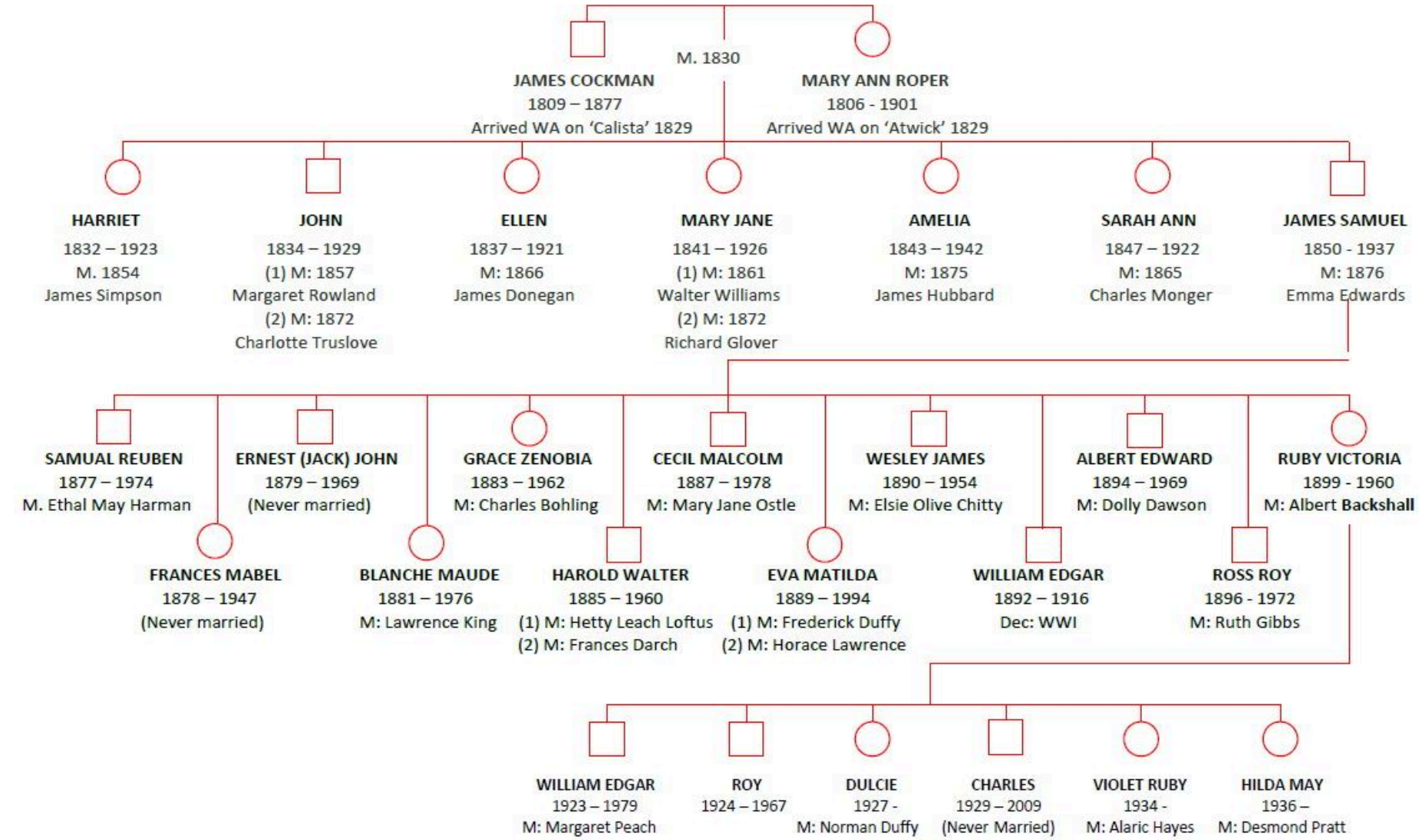


Children of James and Mary Ann Cockman Left to right: Mary Jane Glover, John Cockman, Harriett Simpson, Sarah Ann Monger, Amelia Hubbard - Picture Wanneroo PD01174

Cockman and Backshall Family – Residents of Cockman House

Key

- Woman
- Man
- M - Married



The Role of Children

Large families were much more common in the past so children had to share most things including a bed at night. The second generation of Cockman House children had to sleep up to four to a bed because there were 13 children in the family.



Ruby and Albert Backshall with Granny and children at Cockman House ca 1942

In an interview with Cecil Cockman, he said:
"*We needed a big house for 13 kids. Even so, we had just three bedrooms; my mother and father had one, the girls had one, they were the two bedrooms at the front of the house, and the boys had the bedroom at the back, which is off the kitchen. We slept two or three in one bed and three or four in the other; it was the same for the girls. The beds were big double beds with iron bars above and a canopy over the top to help keep out the winter cold.*"

All members of the family were part of the household work force. The children would fit into the work routine when they became old enough, and when education became available would attend school as well.



Eva Matilda at her 100th birthday party in 1989

A typical day would begin at 5.30am. Chores were usually split into boy's and girl's roles. With girls helping with household duties like cooking and cleaning, while the boys helped out by emptying the chamber pots and farm duties such as feeding animals.

However, these roles were not always fixed. During construction of the house, Mary Ann and the girls helped with many of the arduous farm tasks of mustering cattle, caring for pigs and grinding wheat and corn with a hand operated grister to make flour.

Games and Toys

Eva Matilda Cockman (granddaughter of James and Mary Ann) recalled that the children of the family had no toys except the rag dolls their mother had made for the girls. Sometimes they had dolls made out of wooden pegs. Her father would blow up a pigs bladder for the boys to use as a football.

Land use

Cockman House is located on Whadjuk Noongar Country. Long before European settlers arrived, the land north of the Swan River was cared for by the Mooro people. For thousands of years, the lakes and wetlands around Wanneroo provided fresh water, food and natural materials for making tools.

Noongar people came to this area to hunt, fish, gather bush foods, spend time together and take part in ceremonies. The lakes were also connected by walking trails that stretched north from Perth. Today, these lakes and wetlands continue to be places of great cultural importance for Whadjuk Noongar people and remind us that this landscape has been cared for over many generations.

In the 1800s, James Cockman chose to build his home beside Wallaburnup Swamp because of its reliable water supply and the fertile soil suitable for growing crops. He established a market garden and dairy farm, growing fruit and vegetables, such as tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower , oranges and lemons. While nearby trees such as Jarrah, Marri and Sheoak provided timber for buildings and fences.

Life on the farm was busy. Each day the family cared for animals, planted and harvested crops, and prepared produce to sell at the Perth markets. Travelling by horse and cart along Wanneroo Road took six to eight hours, so the family often travelled through the night to arrive in time for the morning markets.



Market gardener Rista (Chris) Spasich with cabbages



Thomas Harman with horse and cart taking a load of cauliflowers to the market from Badgerup. ca. 1900

Technology

Cockman House was not connected to modern services such as electricity, running water or flushing toilets. Water was first collected from the nearby lake, later deep wells were dug on the property to access water from underground. Collecting water with a bucket was a daily chore for the children.



Toilets were located outside, as indoor toilets did not become common until the 1900s. Before then the family had to use the outside toilet (dunny) during the day. At night, potties and commodes were used inside the house. It was usually the boy's job to empty these the next morning.

In the early 20th century a new level of technology arrived at Cockman House with the construction of a windmill that is seen in so many Australian farms. The windmill uses the power of the wind to power a simple pump that brings water up from the well. The water was then stored in a large tank. Later pipes with taps were added which brought water directly into the house - quite an innovation!



The house did not have electricity until it became a museum in 1989. Before this, candles and kerosene lamps were used for light so the family could read, sew and work in the evenings.

Cooking was done on an open fire, which was central to daily life. It was used for cooking, heating water for washing and bathing, and keeping the house warm in winter.

Without refrigeration, food could not be stored for long. Meat was kept in a meat safe to protect it from flies, while milk and butter were stored in a Coolgardie Safe. This used dripping water and evaporation to keep food cool.

Heritage

Cockman House is now a heritage house museum. The word heritage means something we have inherited from the past and something we value enough to leave for future generations (The National Trust of Australia).

Cockman House helps us understand what life was like for the Cockman family many years ago. It shows us the kinds of technology people used in the past and how family life has changed over time. Cockman House is an important part of Wanneroo's history and has special cultural and historical value to the local community.

In 1997, Cockman House was recognised as an important heritage place across Western Australia when the Heritage Council of Western Australia added it to the State Register of Heritage Places.

Being included on the State Register helps protect Cockman House so that any future changes respect and preserve its heritage value for future generations.

The Heritage Council recognised Cockman House as an important heritage place because it: helps tell the story of European settlement and the beginning of farming in the Wanneroo district during the 1850s;

- Shows what life was like for a small farming family living in the Swan River Colony in the mid-1800s;
- Has a strong connection to James Cockman and his family, who lived and worked there; and
- Is a rare example of an early rural cottage in the Perth metropolitan area, showing how people built homes using the materials and resources available at the time.



Margaret Cockman and Dulcie Duffy at Cockman House, Wanneroo circa 1970s

Activity Suggestion - Theme Heritage

Lower Primary

- Discuss why visiting old houses might be useful and fun. What would you look for on a visit to an old house?
- Discuss what it would be like to have a kitchen with no electricity. Which appliances would not work without electricity? What would it be like to have no fridge or oven?
- Collect photos of objects found in early 20th century kitchens. Discuss how each object worked.

Middle Primary

- Discuss the 'heritage value' of Cockman House. Do you think it should be retained as a heritage place? Why?
- Write a list of current items you think will become museum artifacts in the future and explain why.

Activity Suggestion - Theme Families

Lower Primary

- Discuss the Cockman family size and compare to the students' families today. How do they differ?
- Look at and discuss the Cockman family tree, looking at the four generations that lived at Cockman House. Note the names, how parents' names are repeated. Search for any unusual names we don't see often today.
- Have students create their own family trees - including their parents, siblings and grandparents.

Middle Primary

- Discuss the reasons for farming families having many children - They were members of the work force.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a grandparent share your house.
- Look at and discuss the Cockman family tree, how many generations lived in Cockman House? How are these shown in the tree? Look into life spans of James and Mary Ann and their children - What do you notice about how long they lived?

Activity Suggestion - Theme Immigration

James and Mary Ann were both immigrants from England. An immigrant is someone who moves from one country to live permanently in another. Today, approximately 32% of Western Australia's population and 40% of Wanneroo's population were born overseas.

Lower primary

- Find out which countries your student's families come from and find a picture of the flag(s) of each country. Draw and colour the flags.
- Discuss symbolism. What do the colours in our national flags represents? (Australian flag, Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag).
- Have the students create their own flag with 'symbols' representing important places and events in their lives.

Middle primary

The coast of Australia was explored by Dutch, French and Portuguese mariners before the English claimed the land and settled there.

- Discuss how coming from England affected the way the settlement in Western Australia developed.
- Explore how the society that developed in Western Australia might have been different if these other European countries colonised here instead of the English.
- Research the other passengers that arrived on the ships *Calista* or the *Atwick* along with James Cockman and Mary Ann Roper. Chooses some passengers and research what happened to them and their families.

The passenger lists for the ships can be found on the links below:

HMS *Calista*
The *Atwick*

Cockman House

Floor plan prediction activity instructions

Step 1.

Print out the floor plan in A3 and the object sheet in A4.

Step 2.

Cut out objects and predict which room they belong in.

You can glue the objects into the predicted rooms

Discuss **why** you think they belong there.

Step 3.

When your class visits Cockman House you can compare your predictions to the real thing.

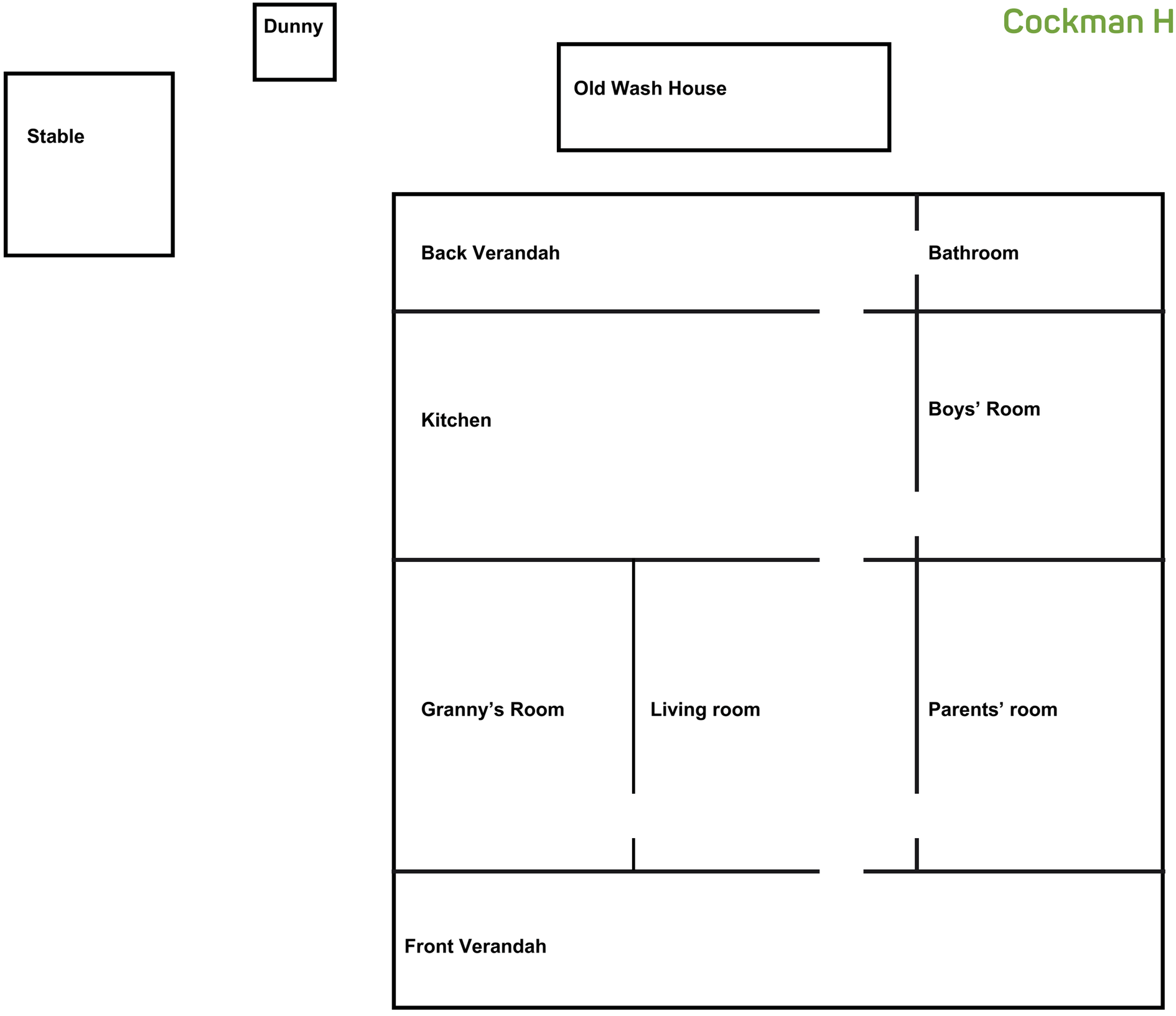
Or

You can use this after your excursion to remember the different rooms and objects.

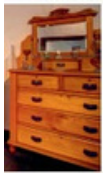
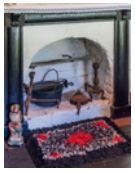
This activity can be done as a whole class or in smaller groups.



Cockman House floor plan A3



Cockman House objects sheet

 butter churner	 cart	 Coolgardie safe	 candle holder	 dolly peg
 dunny	 dresser	 grafonola	 ice chest	 iron
 jarrah floor blocks	 lantern	 limestone wall	 meat safe	 potty
 potty	 potty	 sewing machine	 sofa	 tools
 wash basin	 washboard	 bathtub	 wood stove	 fireplace

Cockman House objects answer sheet

Butter churner - **kitchen**
Cart - **stable**
Coolgardie safe - **kitchen**
Candle holder - **bedrooms, living room**
Dolly peg - **old wash house**
Dunny - **outside / dunny**
Dresser - **bedrooms**
Grafonola - **living room**
Ice chest - **kitchen**
Iron - **old wash house**
Jarrah floor blocks - **back verandah**
Lantern - **living room, kitchen, bedrooms**
Limestone wall - **Front verandah and all of the external walls**
Meat safe - **back verandah**
Potty - **bedrooms**
Sewing machine - **living room**
Sofa - **living room**
Tools - **back verandah**
Wash basin - **bedrooms**
Washboard - **Old wash house**
Bathtub - **bathroom**
Wood stove - **kitchen**
Fire place - **living room**

