

The Houses

The construction of the three houses for keepers and their families was as essential as the lighthouse itself.

The houses all had the same features:

- The main house
- A water tank with a holding capacity of over 25000 litres each
- A wash house
- A fowl house
- A white picket fence

The plan for the houses at Cape Brett became the standard design for the Marine Department. They were built from timber primarily sourced from the Government sawmill located at Kakahi (10km from Taumarunui).¹²² The timbers were ordered as soon as possible, stacked and set aside to season at the sawmill for several months before being transported to the Cape.¹²³ There was further blasting at the sites to make a flat area for the houses.

A description of the houses at Cuvier Island matches that of the Cape Brett houses: *'Solid houses of Kauri, with sliding sash windows, wide rusticated weatherboards, ten-foot studs, massive fascia boards and corrugated iron roofs.'*¹²⁴

The marine engineer's report of 1909 discusses the contractors' building progress: *'At the end of the year, two of the three cottages were rather more than $\frac{3}{4}$ completed and the third was $\frac{1}{2}$ completed.'*¹²⁵

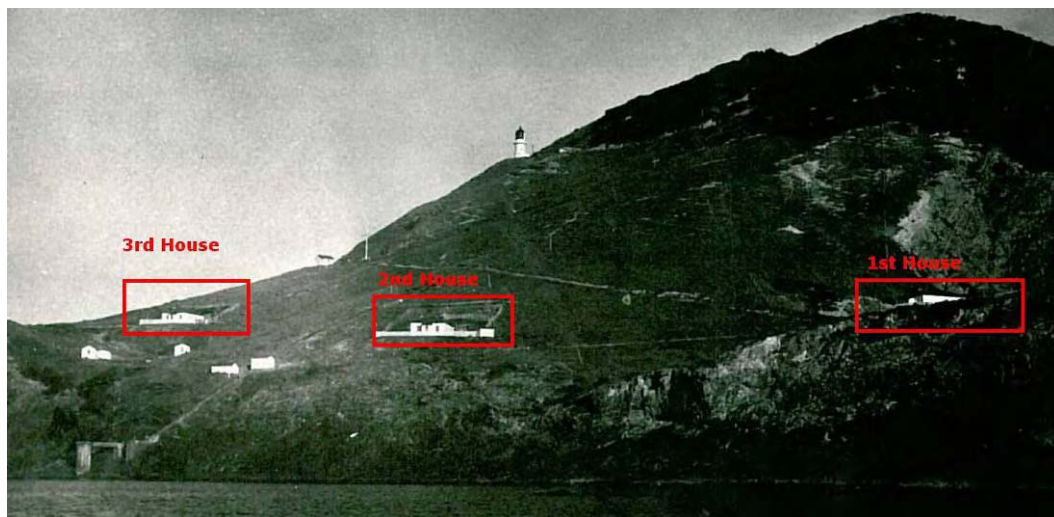


Figure 48 - Location of the three houses.

It is likely the three houses and associated structures were finished by September or early October of 1909 so the three keepers could move in and complete the establishment of the station before the light was lit in late February.

The water tanks were placed on the left side of the cutting for all three houses; each had a standard concrete path right around the house. Each house had eight rooms and was filled with standard furniture supplied by the Marine Department. The houses had an 'open plan' kitchen and lounge to save on space (see Figure 50).

The houses weren't free for the keepers; they all had to pay a rent, even in remote locations such as Cape Brett where the nearest town would have been an eight hour tramp away. In 1946 £50 was deducted from keepers' salaries yearly to cover rent, fuel and lighting.¹²⁶

The Principal Keeper's house

The first house was positioned on the far west of the station about 46 metres above sea level. The house was assigned to the principal keeper, but no particular features (especially in its early history) distinguished it from the other two. The house continued to shelter the principal keepers, from Robert McIver and family in 1910 to Noel Proebstel and family in 1978.

In addition to the house, the double concrete tanks, and the wash house, the house had an associated cow shed built at the front of the hill. The wash house was also used as the office and post office for the principal keeper for many years. The office remained until a designated office was included in the power house in 1968.¹²⁷

The house was well maintained until the keepers moved out in 1978. It was demolished by the Bay of Islands Maritime and Historic Park Board in the 1980s because of weather-related deterioration and because of the deterioration that results when no one lives in a building for some time.



Figure 49 – The principal keeper's house (viewed from the east) with associated gardens and structures.

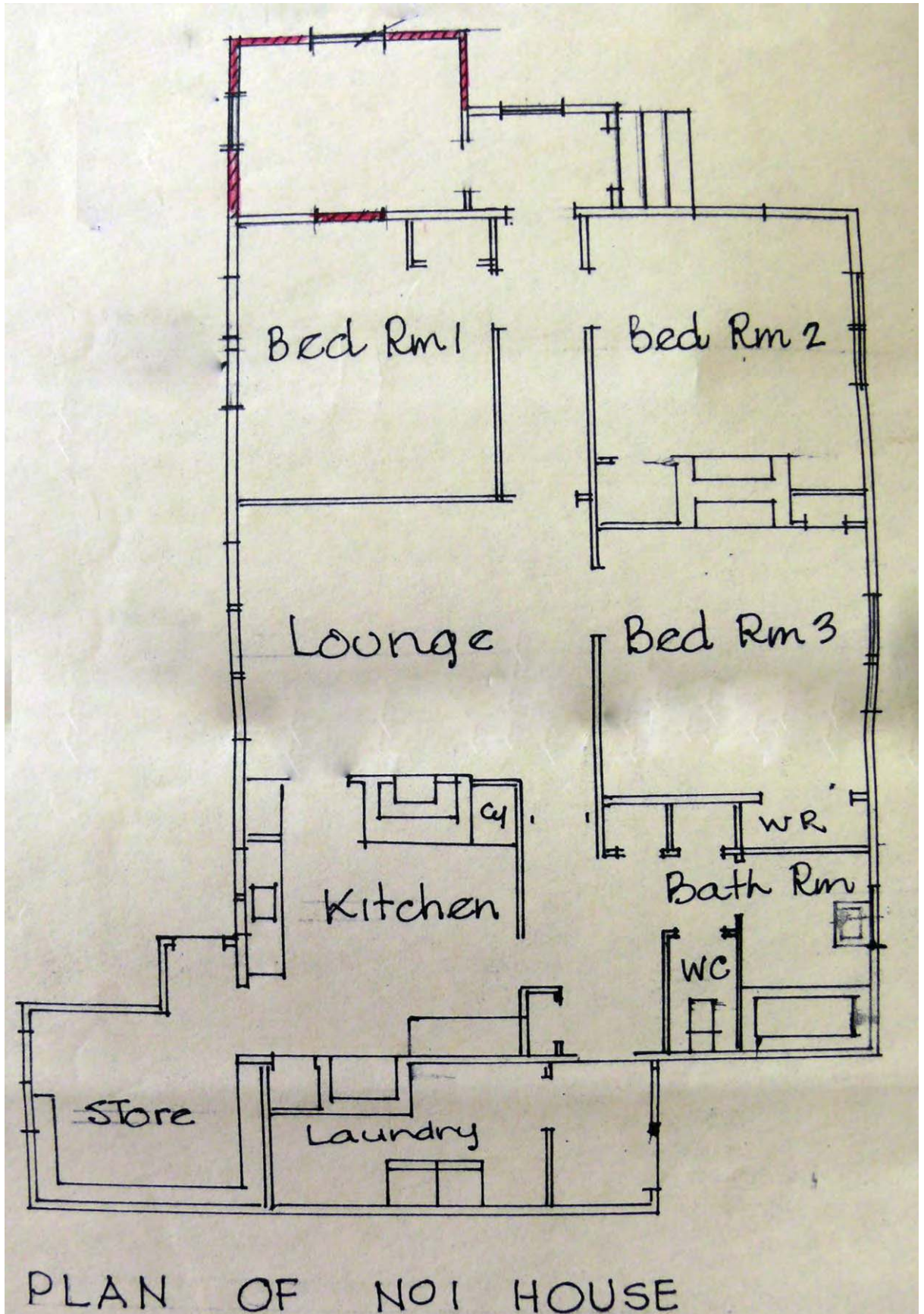


Figure 50 – Floor plan of the first house.

The First Assistant Keeper's House

The second house was centred close to the tramway and also located 46 metres above sea level. The house was usually relegated to the first-assistant/assistant keeper and its first occupiers were Frances Earnest Lee and family in 1909.

Eighty-six years later the house was converted into the current Department of Conservation hut, which attracts visitors from all over the world. DOC staff gutted the house to provide a decent number of beds – 23 – for visitors in two large and one small bunk rooms, and allowing for a larger kitchen area at the front of the house and new toilets behind the house. They also painted, varnished the floors and installed gas for the four gas stoves.



Figure 51 – The second house (pre modifications – where it gains a few more windows on the exterior.

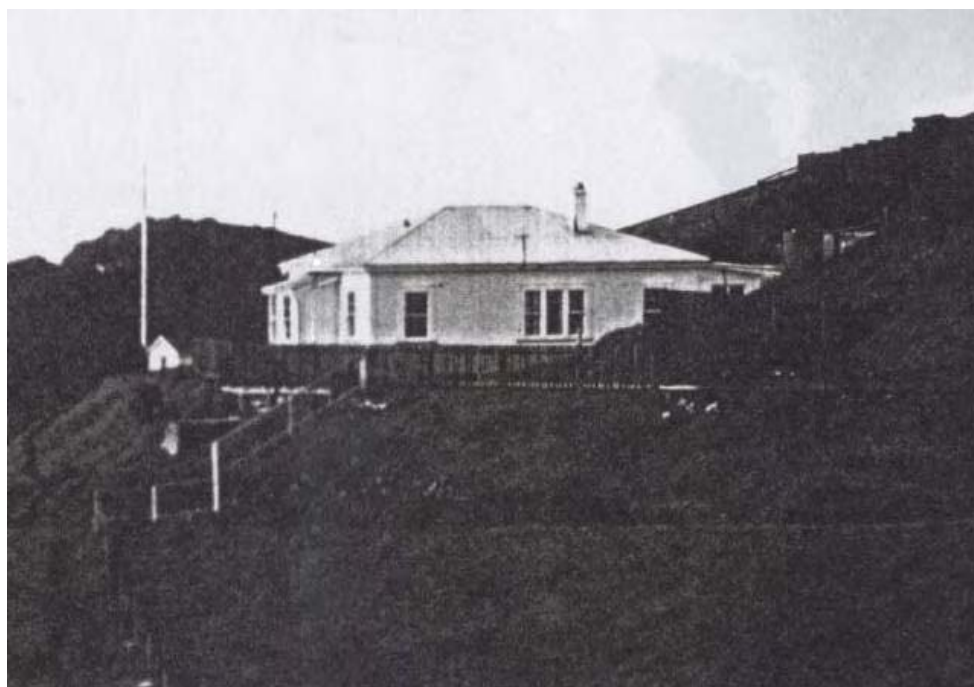


Figure 52 - A 1970s view of the second house taken from the first house.

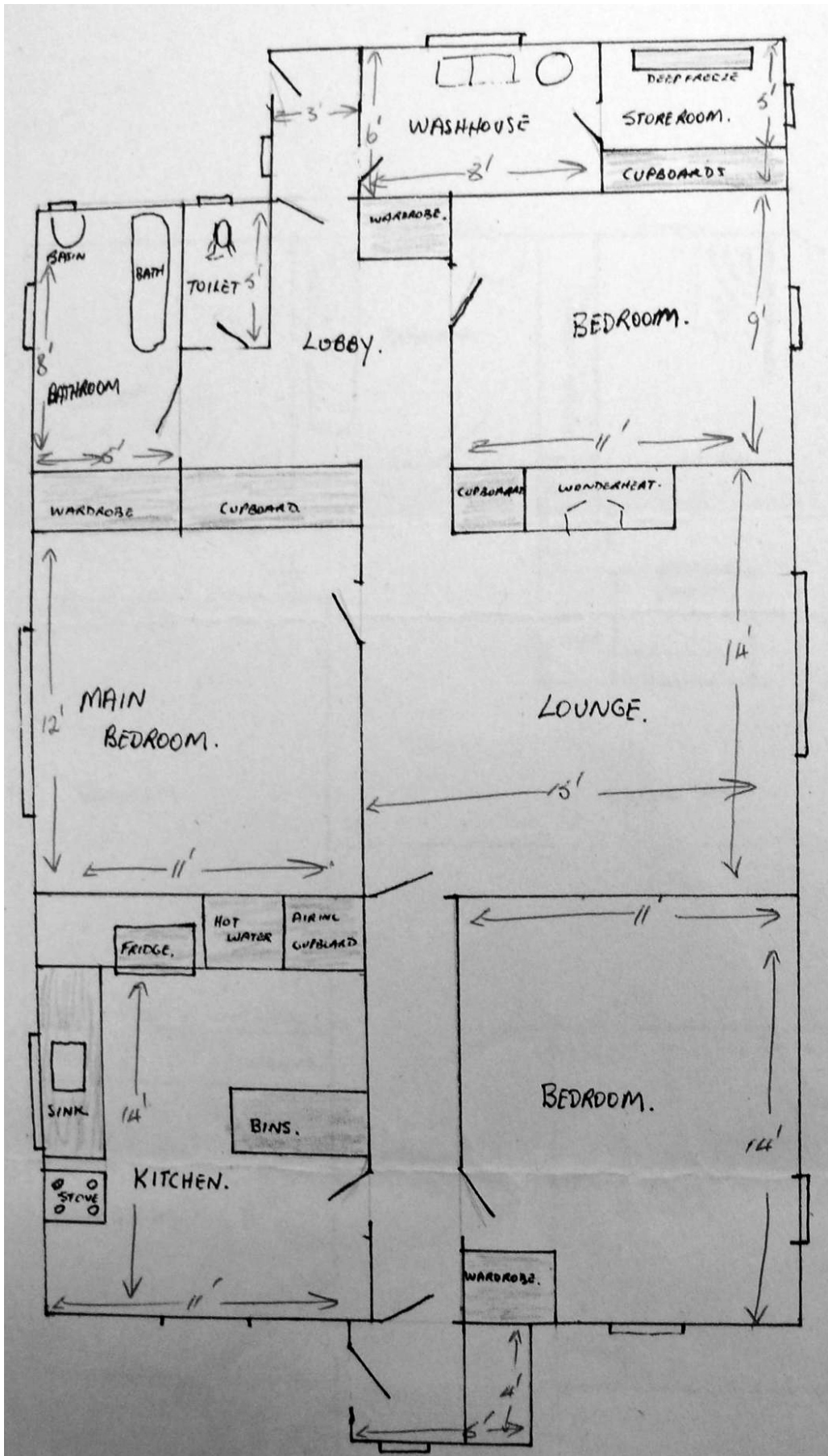


Figure 53 – Floor plan of the second house.



Figure 54 – The hut in the process of being refurbished, 1996.



Figure 55 – The outside of the second house in the process of being painted, 1996.

The Second Assistant Keeper's House

The third house was for the second assistant keeper. When the lighthouse was electrified there was no longer a need for the station to have three keepers and so from 1955 the house became visitor accommodation.¹²⁸ Occupants during this time included Ministry of Works construction gangs (who were at the station for long periods of time for renovations to the houses and repairs to all buildings), the Marine Department mechanics and lighthouse inspectors.¹²⁹ It was also used as a holiday home for department staff. The mechanic in the 1970s took his family there for three weeks over Christmas (it would have been beneficial to have a mechanic on site if something went wrong at Christmas).¹³⁰



Figure 56 – The front view of the third house with the signal hut in background.



Figure 57 – The third house from the east.

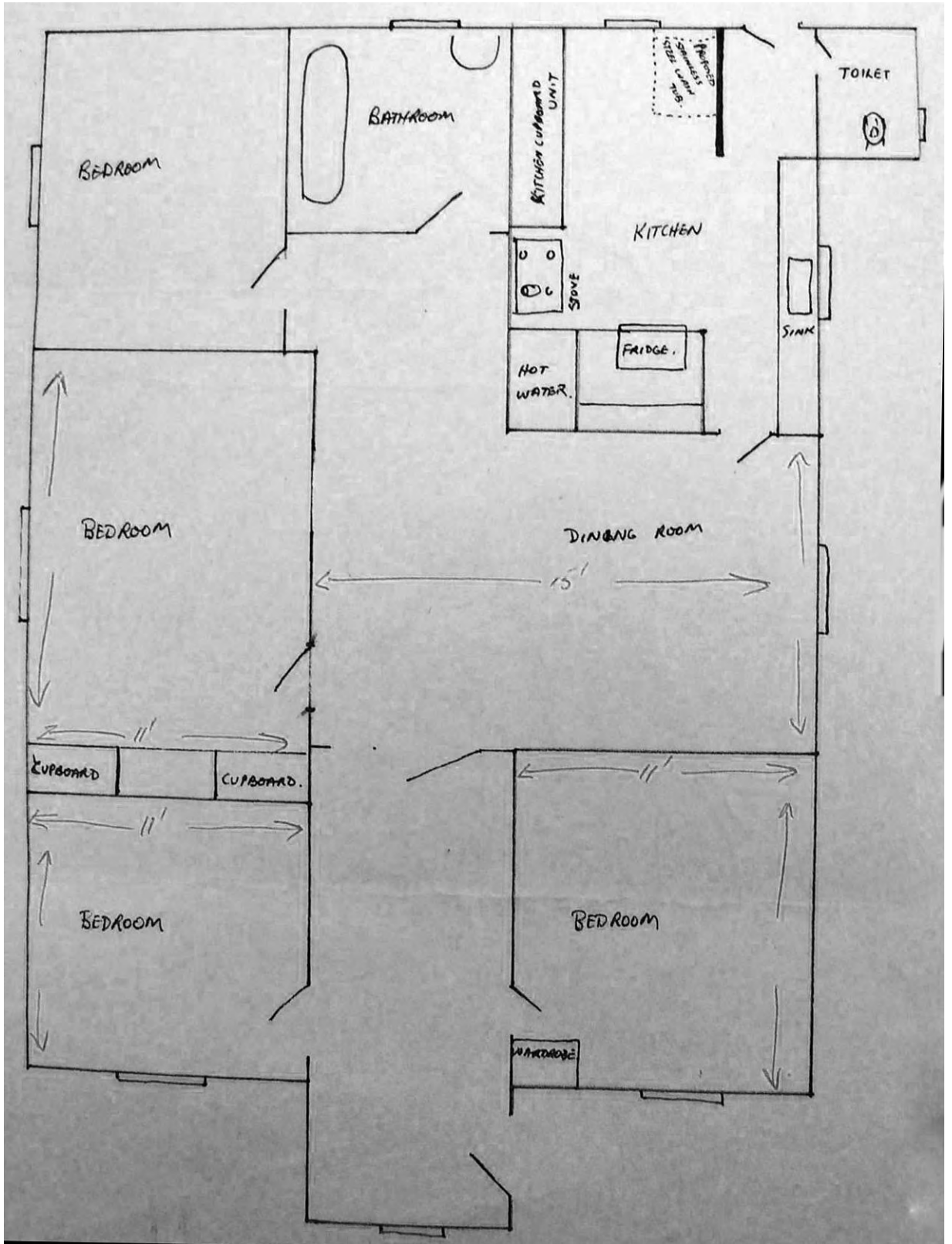


Figure 58 – The floor plan for the third house.