

## Mercy Hospital (former)

Address 145-161 Grey Street, East Melbourne 3002

Practice Stephenson & Meldrum

Designed 1934

Completed 1935

**History & Description** The original six level reinforced concrete building was designed by architects Stephenson and Meldrum (later Stephenson and Turner) in the inter-war Functionalist style and built by W C Burne in 1934-35. The original building was extended eastwards along Grey Street in a sympathetic design in 1939, and a further multi-level eastward extension for consulting and operating suites was completed in 1972.

Arthur Stephenson travelled to Europe and America in 1932-33 to study hospital design. Whilst in Finland he visited the Paimo Sanatorium designed by Alvar Aalto and was greatly impressed. On his return to Australia, his design language changed completely. The Mercy Hospital was the first to be built and it employed the stark white surfaces of the German and French modernists such as Gropius and Corbusier. This was a feature that was celebrated in contemporary journals of the time.

It is said that Stephenson chose the modernist idiom for hospital design because it suited the advanced scientific, medical, and programmatic principles of the institution, and the functionalist expression allowed for simple planning and honesty of expression. With its bold reinforced concrete structure, expressed staircases, deep balconies and simple interiors, the Mercy was followed by a succession of other hospitals in Victoria (the Freemason's Hospital, East Melbourne 1936, Bethesda Hospital, Richmond 1936, the Royal Melbourne Hospital 1936-41), and throughout Australia, all designed using the bold forms of the new functionalism.

- Extracts from citation for VHR #H1854



During construction 1934, photo by Lyle Fowler [SLV]

**Statement of Significance**

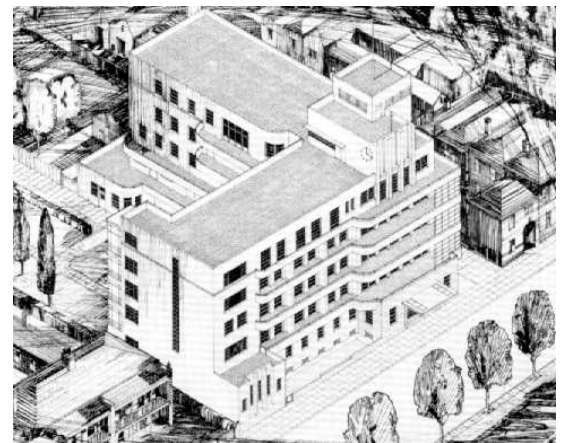
The Mercy Hospital was the first of a new generation of modern Australian hospitals built after the depression based on European modernist principles. It was also important as a seminal example of the work of Stephenson & Meldrum, later Stephenson & Turner, which became Australia's largest architectural practice. Commenced by Arthur George Stephenson (1890-1967) in the 1919, the firm specialised in hospital design. In 1954 Stephenson was knighted for services to architecture and was the first Australian to receive a Royal Institute of British Architects Gold Medal. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects awarded him a similar medal in 1963.

References: Donald Leslie Johnson, *Australian Architecture 1901-51*, pp 138-139. Philip Goad & others, *Australian Modern: The architecture of Stephenson & Turner*, pp15-18.

**Criteria Applicable**

N1 - Significant heritage value in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or period of design.

N5 - Having a special association with the life or works of an architect of significant importance in our history.



Aerial perspective, ca.1934, Stephenson & Turner, SLV



Shortly after completion in 1936, *Aust. Architecture 1901-1951*, p139