

**Mildura Base Hospital, Mildura, Vic, (1934). Architect:
Leighton Irwin
Source: *RVIA Journal*, Sept., 1933**

1. Identity of Building

- 1.1 Former Mildura Base Hospital
- 1.2 Mildura Base Hospital
- 1.3 137 – 157 13th Street
- 1.4 Mildura
- 1.5 Victoria
- 1.6 3500
- 1.7 Australia
- 1.8 n/a
- 1.9 Community Hospital / “T” Plan Block Hospital
- 1.10 Protected as a historic place on the Victorian Heritage Register, a state level statutory register

2. History of Building

- 2.1 The hospital was designed for the rapidly growing inland, regional city of Mildura, several hundred kilometers from larger coastal cities Adelaide and Melbourne. It was part of a wave of hospitals designed and built in the 1930s and 1940s in Australia as government policies sought to create a comprehensive system of hospital care by encouraging the construction of so-called community or intermediate hospitals. Following the recommendations of visiting American hospital expert Malcolm MacEachern in 1928, the Victoria and New South Wales state governments pursued policies that saw the establishment of new intermediate hospitals to serve those who could not afford private hospital care but did not qualify for charity. New hospitals enabled advanced medical care in parts of Australia previously without such a service. In cities they filled the gap between the charity hospitals and the fully private

institutions that existed at the time. While Mildura had an earlier hospital, the new “base” hospital marked a new era of advanced medicine and modern accommodation

2.2 1931-1934

2.3 Architect: Irwin and Stevenson (1892-1962). Leighton Irwin was a hospital specialist with a considerable knowledge of international developments in the field in the 1920s and 1930s. In the early 1930s Irwin was on the editorial board of the Stuttgart based trade journal *Nosokomeion*, a key organ for encouraging and publicizing the development of hospital modernization. In partnership with Roy Stevenson and then as Leighton Irwin & Co. Irwin undertook nearly 40 separate hospital projects in Australia between the early 1930s and the immediate postwar period. Among the most distinguished of these were the Prince Henry's Hospital, Melbourne, Vic, (1936-1941), Royal Hobart Hospital, Tas, (1936-1938), Broken Hill Hospital, NSW, (1938), Rachel Forster Hospital in Redfern, NSW, (1939-1950) and the Heidelberg Military Hospital, Heidelberg, Vic, (1940-1943)

2.4 n/a

2.5 The 1934 hospital is largely intact

2.6 Vacant

2.7 The inside of the building was modified frequently during its 66 years of use as a hospital. Many parts of the building are in poor condition, but its overall structural integrity is intact.

3. Description

3.1 The three-story Mildura hospital building was based on a “T” shaped plan and is organized behind a symmetrical front. The ground floor originally housed the outpatient department as well as a series of clinics, laboratories and treatment rooms. The first floor above ground level housed wards for medical cases while the second was for surgical patients. Typically for hospitals of this generation operating theatres were on the top floor. At either end of the main part of the building in the curved section were a children's solarium and day rooms for use by ambulatory patients. Kitchen, laundry and other services were located on the ground floor of the rear section of the building. The architect's office described the design at the time in the following terms: “Suggestive of modern Northern European character, it nevertheless breathes the spirit of the progressive and wide awake nature of the community it serves.”

3.2 The building was a reinforced concrete frame resting on what the architect's office described at the time as a “concrete raft”. Non-structural wall divisions were of brick and terracotta.

3.3 The hospital was constructed several blocks from the centre of the city on a site that was originally set among vineyards. It has subsequently been surrounded by low level suburban-style development.

4. Evaluation

- 4.1 The Mildura Base Hospital was not technically advanced in comparison with contemporary metropolitan hospitals but it did incorporate several markers of advanced hospital organisation such as central kitchen and laundry facilities rather than ward base service.
- 4.2 The hospital is socially significant as the place where several generations of Mildura's inhabitants have experienced the transformative events associated with childbirth, serious illness and death.
- 4.3 The primary significance of the hospital is in its overall expressive form. In the perspective drawing of the hospital there is a strong evocation of a tri-plane, underlining the connection between modern medical care and overt symbols of modern life. The continuous balconies and steel pipe railings also evoked the ocean liner, a common association in the work of progressively-oriented architects in the period. An appearance of efficiency, mechanical rationality and salubrity are all hallmarks of the Mildura Base Hospital. By drawing these connections the architects encouraged the local community to invest confidence in their new facility.
- 4.4 As above
- 4.5 The demolition of the neighbouring nurses' home (1948-1951) and the sale of much of the building's curtilage, much of which has been redeveloped as housing, has reduced dramatically reduced the site's potential for effective adaptive reuse and eroded the quality of the physical setting. It remains, nevertheless, a powerful marker of the aspirations of the community toward social and technical modernisation in the interwar decades and a highly significant example of modern architecture in a regional setting.

5. Documentation

- 5.1 Heritage Alliance, 'Mildura Base Hospital Heritage Report', Melbourne, 2000
Philip Goad, 'Leighton Irwin: Civility, Hospitals and Modernism', Proceedings of XXV SAHANZ Conference, Geelong 2008
Cameron Logan, 'Leighton Irwin', *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press)355-356
- 5.2 Visual material attached
- 5.3 Cameron Logan, 2012

Additional Visual Material:

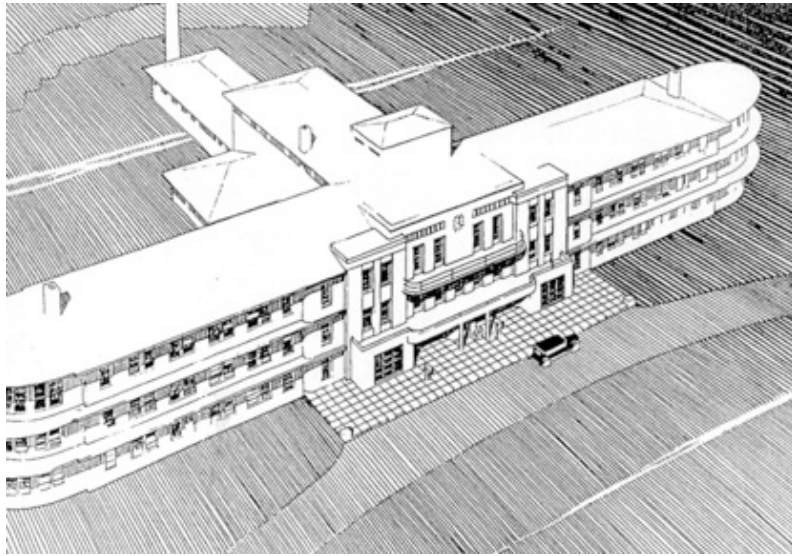


Figure 1. Architects Impression Mildura Base Hospital, 1931. Source: *RVIA Journal*, Sept., 1933



Figure 2. Photograph of Mildura Base Hospital showing curved wing, c.1940s. Source: State Library of Victoria



Figure 3. Contemporary photograph showing curved wing. Cameron Logan, 2008



Figure 4. Contemporary photograph showing entrance and front facade, Cameron Logan, 2008