



Sandringham District Hospital, Sandringham, Vic, (1957-1964). Architect: Esmond Dorney. Source: *Foundations: the journal of architecture, engineering and building*, Vol. 2, no.6, June 1961, p.43

1. **Identity of Building**

- 1.1 Sandringham Hospital
- 1.2 Sandringham and District Memorial Hospital
- 1.3 Corner Bluff Rd and Edward Street
- 1.4 Sandringham
- 1.5 Victoria
- 1.6 3191
- 1.7 Australia
- 1.8 n/a
- 1.9 District Hospital / Polygonal
- 1.10 No protections

2. History of Building

2.1 Residents of Sandringham and surrounds had agitated for a hospital in their district since at least 1939. In 1946 a site was identified for the hospital and work began on a nurses' home in 1951. But financing for the hospital fell through and the project was delayed for five more years. In 1956 a sketch concept was produced by Esmond Dorney and the concept was later developed by Dorney in collaboration with GM Hirsch.

2.2 1957-1964

2.3 **Esmond Dorney (1906-1991)** was a prominent Australian architect who grew up in Melbourne but spent the bulk of his career in Tasmania. There he developed a reputation for expressive, formally innovative buildings. His so called Butterfly House , Sandy Bay (1963) and St. Pius X, Taroom (1958) are two of his better-known works from the period when he designed Sandringham Hospital. After spending significant time recuperating in hospital in the postwar years Dorney developed an interest in hospital design. In 1953 he obtained a patent for radial hospital plan, which he employed first for an aged care home in Tasmania and subsequently for the Sandringham and District Hospital. **GM Hirsch (1906-1986)** was a Rumanian-born architect who arrived in Australia in 1950 and established Conarg Pty Ltd. Much less well known than Dorney, Hirsch was said to be responsible for documenting the project as well as for detailing some of the elevations and for the site layout and landscape elements of the design.

2.4 n/a

2.5 There have been a number of programmatic changes over the half century of the hospitals' operation but the major plan elements from which the hospital derives its overall form remain intact.

2.6 Hospital

2.7 Good

3. Description

3.1 The hospital was originally planned to accommodate 88 beds. It is characterized by its unusual trio of polygonal buildings with axes connecting the central stations of each, forming a triangular arrangement, with each apex articulated as a ring. The largest of the three polygons is three stories. At its centre were the main administrative offices and at the centre of those offices was a cylindrical light court. At the center of the smaller two polygonal buildings were nurses' stations. Externally the building is clad in dark grey concrete blocks with horizontal raked joints which create a banded effect. The corners have distinctive textured quality derived from the use of alternating brick courses. The two smaller sections have bubble-shaped domed roofs, while the larger polygon has pop-up clerestory roof form. The main entrance has a large cantilevered *port cochère*.

3.2 External walls of thin concrete blocks, windows are aluminium framed.

3.3 Well to do middle class suburban context of low rise detached houses

4. Evaluation

4.1 n/a

4.2 The hospital is socially significant in the local area as an important place associated with childbirth, illness and death.

4.3 The significance of this building resides mostly in its innovative polygonal planning. It represents a moment in hospital design when the monolithic block hospital was challenged by different approaches which attempted to break down the hospital into smaller units at a more human scale. At the same time the architects sought to maintain a highly rationalized approach to planning that enabled efficiencies in the observation of patients and circulation of staff and visitors.

4.4 As above

4.5 While the ambitions of the architects may have been thwarted somewhat by the difficulties introduced by the polygonal planning, most notably difficulty navigating the complex and certain areas of redundant space, the buildings are highly distinctive and speaks eloquently of a moment in the evolution of modernism when the heroic forms of its initial decades were gradually set aside in a search for something more in tune with a human scale and the existing surrounds

5. Documentation

5.1 'Sandringham Memorial Hospital', *Foundations: the journal of architecture, engineering and building*, Vol. 2, no.6, June 1961, 40-43

Harry W. Nunn, *A Most Ingenious Hospital: A History of Sandringham and District Memorial Hospital*, (Sandringham: Sandringham Hospital, 1990)

Heritage Alliance, 'City of Bayside Inter-war and Post-war Heritage Study', 2007 Accessed. 28/07/2011,

http://www.bayside.vic.gov.au/IW_and_PW_Heritage_Study_VOLUMETWO_final_may_2010.pdf

Helen Graham, 'James Henry Esmond Dorney', *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press) 213-214

5.2 Visual material

5.3 Cameron Logan 2012

Additional Visual Material



Figure 1. Contemporary view of hospital entry. Source: <http://www.alfred.org.au/News.aspx?ID=340>