St Paul’s Anglican Memorial Church, Proserpine, the second church constructed on the site, was designed by the North Queensland architectural firm of E. H. Oribin and S. G. Barnes and constructed by Les Tinsley and Co. The church was dedicated on 4 July 1959.

Anglican services in the Proserpine district had been established at least by 13 June 1896 when a church service was conducted by a visiting priest from Bowen. Subsequent church services were held occasionally when priests visited the district. In 1899 the Anglican community wanted to establish a place of worship in town, prompting Bishop Christopher George Barlow, the second Bishop of North Queensland, to visit Proserpine. In June 1905 the Corporation of the Diocesan Synod of North Queensland acquired the property on Main Street. The first church was dedicated on 24 July 1906. In 1958 a campaign to raise funds for the building of a new and modern church was put into action. This campaign was successful, and on 9 July 1958, Governor of Queensland Sir Henry Abel Smith laid the foundation stone. With the construction of a new church the original one was moved to the rear of the property.

The church was designed by Cairns-based architect E. H. (Eddie) Edwin Oribin in 1958 when Oribin was still in partnership with S. G. Barnes. Eddie Henry [Eddie] Oribin was born in Cairns in February 1927. Whilst the Oribin family was holidaying in Brisbane in January 1942 Cairns was closed to all civilians due to the grave war situation. The family did not return to Cairns until April 1944.

Four months after his return Oribin commenced architectural training with Sid G Barnes, at that time the Chief Architect of the Allied Works Council for North Queensland. Barnes trained Oribin with a solid grounding in structural design and construction. Oribin returned to Cairns with his wife and children in March 1953 to begin a partnership with Barnes. Oribin undertook a wide range of work in North Queensland. Oribin’s first house was designed in August 1957 and built in 1958, and was followed by the construction of his own studio in 1960. Increasing awareness of Oribin’s work led to commissions for several churches, including the Gordonvale Church of England [1955], Mareeba Methodist Church [1960]; Innisfail Presbyterian Church [1960] and the Proserpine Anglican Church [1959].

St Paul’s Anglican Church was the first parabolic arch church in Queensland. The plan is arranged with the longitudinal axis of the building oriented north-south, positioning the sanctuary to the south and the nave to the north. The main parabolic frames are laminated timber, constructed on site, with the exception of the front frame made of pre-cast concrete. The first two laminated arches were constructed early and were used as the basis for the formwork of the front concrete arch. Oribin extensively detailed all internal fixtures of the church including candle holders and sanctuary doors. The sanctuary doors displayed stylized interpretations of Saints Peter and Paul and were designed and routed by Oribin. The sanctuary doors have since been removed.

The church is distinctive in design with Oribin responding directly to the individual needs of his client while still allowing experimentation with constructional and design ideas. The church utilises a rectilinear structural grid based on modular materials and standard sizes constructed primarily of glued laminated parabolic arches. Oribin maintained natural finishes wherever possible. The church provides particularly fine examples of Oribin’s versatility - crafting motifs of Saints Peter and Paul and personally producing seven acid etched copper panels each depicting a station of the cross. Other copper work for the church was supplied by Rainbow Metalworks at Mareeba.

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St Paul’s Anglican Church is particularly significant for its landmark and expressive attributes particularly its landmark arches and modern design. Oribin’s design expresses a sense of modernity and forms a significant element of the Main Street of Proserpine. The integrity of the design is enhanced by Oribin designed and detailed complementary interior fittings and furniture, such as the stations of the cross, which he etched on copper panels.

St Paul’s Anglican Memorial Church is significant as an example of the work of Cairn’s architect E. H. Oribin. Oribin made an important contribution to North Queensland’s built environment. He undertook a wide range of work in North Queensland and is particularly known for the fine group of churches that he designed in Innisfail and Mareeba, and the Mareeba Shire Hall. St Paul’s Anglican Memorial Church dates from the period between 1955 and 1960, a significant time for Oribin. It is also an early example of the use of parabolic arches made from laminated timber beams.

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St Paul’s Anglican Memorial Church is significant in demonstrating the evolution of parabolic arches made from laminated timber beams.
St Paul's Anglican Church

and at night by internal lighting. The exposed timber arches and ceiling lining are illuminated by indirect natural light, across the apex of the building by a suspended ceiling cove. The ceiling cove conceals most of the natural light source in addition to housing recessed artificial lighting and ventilation.

The church has original furniture including timber pews and pulpits as well as the original copper candle holders and font designed and made by Oribin. A bronze war memorial plaque is located in the south-west corner of the church. Next to the memorial plaque near the main feature window is the original copper font.

The earlier timber church has been re-located to the rear of the site and is currently used for storage. This single storey timber building has an arched entrance double leaf entrance door with decorative wrought iron hinges. The gable roof is clad with iron. The western wall of the building has been clad with Trim-deck.

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References

Delys Jeppesen, 2006. St Paul's Anglican Church, Proserpine: Celebrating 100 Years.
Register of the National Estate (archived).