

# *Communities of Faith: Regional Queensland's Innovative Modern Post-war Church Architecture*

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*The tyranny of distance delayed the construction of permanent ecclesiastical buildings in most townships in regional Queensland. While Brisbane, the state's capital, had made significant strides in church construction by the mid-twentieth century, Queensland's regional areas remained remarkably, even deplorably underserviced. From the 1950s, Queensland's Christian denominations embarked on church building campaigns and engaged local architects to create some of the most daring and expressive modern churches in the state. These include "maverick architect" Edwin Oribin's Mareeba Methodist church (1960) and St Andrew's Presbyterian in Innisfail (1961); Neville Willis' St Andrew's Church of England in Longreach (1960); and Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen's St Alban's Church of England in Cunnamulla (1963). These buildings are beacons within their regional townships. Today, more post-war ecclesiastical buildings are protected by state heritage listings in Queensland's remote regional areas, than in Brisbane proper—a staggering ratio of four to one. It appears that despite their remoteness, international architectural ideas penetrated deep into Queensland's regional townships. What's more, their remoteness seems to have created freedom to experiment. This paper examines the tyrannies and felicities of geographical distance. Based on interviews, archival research and fieldwork, it traces how international and national ideas regarding modern church architecture circulated in Australia and reached Queensland's remote regional areas, where they inspired some of Queensland's most exciting ecclesiastical experiments.*

*Keywords:* *Edwin Oribin; Neville Willis; Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen; modern church architecture; regional Queensland*

## Regional Queensland's Post-War Churches

In Queensland, as elsewhere in Australia, a church building boom occurred between 1955 and 1965. In these ten years more than 600 new church buildings opened in the state.<sup>1</sup> This boom occurred across Christian denominations and reached nearly every regional centre, with many communities realising new “permanent” brick churches.<sup>2</sup> Realising permanent churches in these remote regions had, however, been a struggle prior to the mid-1950s. The vastness of the state, its challenging terrain, its harsh climatic conditions, and the distance from church leadership in Brisbane, interstate and abroad, all slowed down church development efforts pre-World War Two. These pre-interwar religious hardships are recorded in the early religious histories of the state, in which the authors emphasised their severity by drawing comparisons with the more densely populated, more developed and wealthier dioceses abroad.<sup>3</sup> For each denomination, Queensland's regional religious districts, presbyteries, dioceses and parishes were large in area, sparsely populated and its people were frequently of limited financial means.

In a bid to catch up, more than 300 churches were built in regional Queensland between 1955 and 1965 (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> A surprising number of these were highly innovative and experimental when compared to other churches that were constructed in Brisbane in this same period. These regional buildings tested novel forms, materials and geometries, as well

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Marie Daunt, “Communities of Faith: Modern Church Architecture in Queensland 1945-1977” (unpublished doctoral research, University of Queensland, 2016-current).

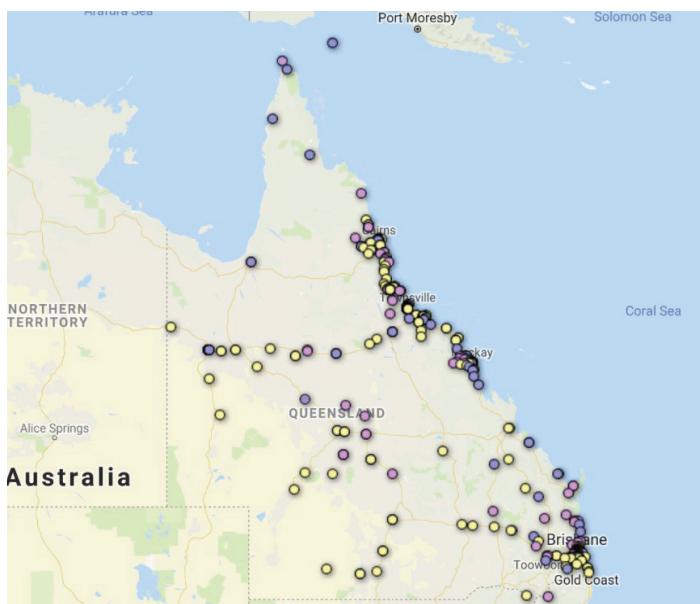
<sup>2</sup> Daunt, “Communities of Faith.”

<sup>3</sup> Refer: E.C. Rowland, *The Tropics for Christ: Being a History of the Diocese of North Queensland* (Townsville: Diocese of North Queensland, 1960). Also see Richard Bardon, *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland* (Brisbane: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, 1949); R.S.C. Dingle, ed., *Annals of Achievement: A Review of Queensland Methodism 1847-1947* (Brisbane: Queensland Book Depot, 1947); Robert Henry Haldon Philip, “Steel all Through: The Church of England in Central Queensland Transplantation and Adaptation 1892-1942” (PhD diss., Central Queensland University, 2002); John Maguire, *Prologue: A History of the Catholic Church as Seen From Townsville 1863-1983* (Toowoomba: Church Archivists' Society, 1990); Otto Thiele, *One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland* (Brisbane: Publication Committee of the Queensland District United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> Daunt, “Communities of Faith.”

Figure 1. Map of Queensland's 1945-1975 church buildings. (Map courtesy of Google GBRMPA, 2019. Data compiled by author, 2019.)

1945-1954 shown pink—at least 280 built, of these 88 were in Brisbane.  
1955-1964 shown yellow—over 600 were built, of these 186 were in Brisbane.  
1965-1975 shown blue—over 300 were built, of these 97 were in Brisbane.



as different approaches to structural expression and spatial planning. Importantly, they also readily adopted emergent ideas regarding liturgical renewal (some even ahead of the Catholic Church's Second Ecumenical Council, Vatican II).<sup>5</sup> Equally surprising is the awareness of national and international trends in architecture that these regional churches demonstrate, particularly given their great distance from the capital, Brisbane. In Europe many experimental Catholic and Protestant churches had been realised in the early twentieth century (particularly in Germany, France and Switzerland).<sup>6</sup> From the 1950s these ideas were explored in America and Great Britain, from where they were subsequently transferred to Australia.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, four exemplar church buildings in regional Queensland will be discussed. These buildings have been selected as representative of the variety and experimentality that characterised church architecture in post-war church regional Queensland following a systematic review of Queensland's post-war churches and visits to more than eighty of the state's regional churches and over a hundred in the greater-Brisbane region. Although each of these case study churches were designed (for Protestant congregations) ahead of Vatican II, they all demonstrate an awareness of the need for liturgical renewal, and thus demonstrate how physical distance did not hinder the dissemination of progressive ideas, but rather facilitated experimentation with such ideas.

The first two case studies, Mareeba Methodist church (1960, now Uniting) and (the former) St Andrew's Presbyterian in Innisfail (1961), are located in regional townships in far north Queensland, with Cairns as the closest (larger) regional centre to both. These churches have both received recognition in Queensland (and Australian) architectural historiography, and in 2003 St Andrew's Presbyterian was state heritage listed. This paper builds on this earlier scholarship and considers the significance of these churches within the wider context of Australian and international modern church design.

The other two case studies, St Andrew's Church of England in Longreach (1960) and St Alban's Church of England in Cunnamulla (1963), are located in remote and drought prone rural townships in central west Queensland. The Longreach church has received little recognition to date, even though it is a very considered example of a Brisbane-based church architect collaborating with a young, up-and-coming Church of England rector, who had himself received architectural and artistic training. St Alban's Church of England initially received some recognition in Melbourne's *Cross-Section* and has very recently

<sup>5</sup> Other innovative and experimental regional Queensland church buildings included: Hayes and Scott's St Paul's Church of England (1956, North Talwood); Ford Hutton and Newell's St Matthew's Church of England (1957, Mundingburra); Oribin's St Paul's Church of England (1959, Proserpine); Dr Karl Langer's St John's Lutheran Church (1960, Bundaberg); A. Ian Ferrier's St Peter's Catholic Church (1960, Halifax), Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (1965, Mirani) and St Monica's Catholic Cathedral (1968, Cairns); Robin Gibson's Holy Trinity Church of England (1962, Blackall); Ian Black's St Peter's Catholic Church (1964, West End, Townsville); Douglas and Barnes' St George Presbyterian Church (1968); and J.V. Rubins' St Matthew's Lutheran Church (1968, Maryborough).

<sup>6</sup> See Wolfgang Jean Stock, ed., *European Church Architecture 1900-1950* (Munich: Prestel, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> On North American and British experimentation, see Gretchen Buggeln, *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Anat Geva, ed., *Modernism and American Mid-20th Century Sacred Architecture* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019); Robert Proctor, *Building the Modern Church: Roman Catholic Church Architecture in Britain, 1955 to 1975* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). On the transference of ideas to Australia, refer: Philip Goad, "Modernism," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*. Ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 464; and Donald Leslie Johnson, *Australian Architecture 1901-51: Sources of Modernism* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1980), 86-87.

been given a Queensland RAIA enduring architecture award (2017). This initial and more recent attention has focused predominantly on the inventiveness of the building's climatically responsive design features. As with the other case studies, the Cunnamulla church's religious response to the calls of liturgical renewal and its place within Australian and international church design has hitherto not been considered.

## Oribin's Inspired Organic Geometry and Craft-Based Detailing

The Mareeba Methodist Church (fig. 2) was designed by far north Queensland's "maverick architect" Edwin (Eddie) Oribin (1927-2016).<sup>8</sup> Designed on the diagonal, it adopted a different approach to the three other churches that he designed, which all had tall volumes and rectilinear plans (modern-basilicas).<sup>9</sup> When Oribin's Mareeba church opened on August 6, 1960, it was amongst the first modern church buildings in Queensland to arc the seating around the sanctuary.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary construction industry journals praised the church for its closely gathered plan arrangement, its brick and timber detailing, its structural system, and its adaptation to the local climate:

*The Methodist Church at Mareeba, on the Atherton Tablelands is designed to seat 200, so that the congregation is grouped round the preacher, the furthest seat being 30 feet [9 metres] from the pulpit. The building is constructed with red brick structural columns and tower, and natural finish timber elsewhere. The roof is supported internally with an inverted tetrahedron tubular steel space frame, sheeted with tongue and grooved natural timber. Two sides of the church have vertical 12" [300mm] by 2" [50mm]*

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Bingham Hall, *Austral Eden: 200 Years of Australian Architecture* (Sydney: The Watermark Press, 1999), 193.

<sup>9</sup> All Saints Church of England (1955, Gordonvale) with S.G. Barnes; St Paul's Church of England (1959, Proserpine); and St Andrew's Presbyterian (1961, Innisfail).

<sup>10</sup> Scorer and Scorer's Ipswich Congregational (1958) is an earlier Queensland church with an arched plan.

Figure 2. Edwin Oribin, Mareeba Methodist Church (1960). *Left*. Exterior of entry corner. *Right*. Interior of church. (Photograph by author, 2018.)



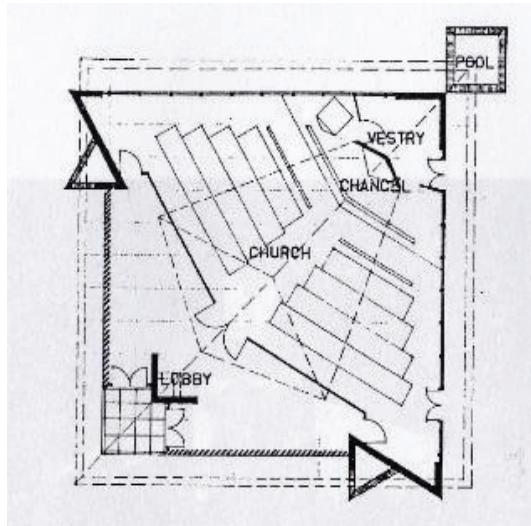


Figure 3. Edwin Oribin, Mareeba Methodist Church (1960). Floor plan. (Reprinted from Majer, "E.H. Oribin," 78.)

*timber louvre blades with glass between, with some movable sections to give sun control and ventilation.<sup>11</sup>*

The *Methodist Times* celebrated its architectural difference: "The building—with walls largely of glass—is of contemporary style and possibly unique."<sup>12</sup>

The church was positioned on the corner of an intersection, which it addressed through the rising of the roof structure, thus covering its dual front entries, each of which faced one of the two streets. The tightness of the site likely led Oribin towards this unconventional kite-shape plan (fig. 3). The publication of Kevin J. Curtin's (of Curtin & Cameron) St Dominic's Catholic Church in Flemington (NSW) in Australian architectural periodicals likely informed this plan shape and building form.<sup>13</sup> St Dominic's has a similar plan arrangement, dual entries and is also positioned to face a street corner. However, Oribin's design is arguably more rational, with the diagonal arrangement neatly contained within a square plan.

Mareeba Methodist's design also evidences Oribin's admiration of Frank Lloyd Wright's organic and geometric designs, and craft-based detailing. The connection between the works of Wright and those of Oribin were noted by Martin Majer in his 1997 undergraduate dissertation and have subsequently been confirmed in more recent architectural historiography.<sup>14</sup> As architectural historian Alice Hampson notes, Oribin's architecture "is characterised by experimentation with new and unconventional materials and inventive structural systems; his stylistic inspirations are drawn from crafted-based detailing and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the influence of

<sup>11</sup> "Building Idea," *C.S.R. Building Materials* 2, no. 10 (December 1964): 14, cited in Martin J. Majer, "E.H. Oribin: The Work of a Far North Queensland Architect" (BArch thesis, 1997), 77.

<sup>12</sup> "New Church at Mareeba," *Methodist Times* (September 8, 1960), 16.

<sup>13</sup> "St. Dominic's Catholic Church, Flemington," *Architecture in Australia* 44, no. 4 (October-December 1955): 100-101; *Cross-Section* 46 (August 1956): 2.

<sup>14</sup> John Macarthur, Deborah van der Plaat, Janina Gosseye, and Andrew Wilson, ed., *Hot Modernism: Queensland Architecture 1945-1975* (London: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2015), 272-3; Margaret Lawrence-Drew, "Eddie Oribin: A Man of the Present and the Future," in *Australian Modern Design: Mid 20th Century Architecture & Design*, ed. Chris Osborn (Carina, Qld: Chris Osborne Publishing, 2015), 48; and Alice Hampson, "Oribin, Eddie" in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, ed. Goad and Willis, 519.

<sup>15</sup> Hampson, "Oribin, Eddie," 519; and as documented in Majer, "E.H. Oribin," 81-90.

Wright's later churches, particularly his First Unitarian Society Meeting House (1952, Madison WI, USA), can be recognised in the angles of Oribin's Mareeba Church.

Mareeba Methodist church was built by local tradesmen, a number of whom had also worked on his earlier St Paul's Church of England in Proserpine (1959) and went on to work on his Mareeba Shire Hall (1961).<sup>16</sup> The church's foundations were dug by hand, and often required water to be poured onto the hard ground to ease the shovelling. The concrete floor was laid and trowelled by hand. Most components of the building were taken on by as few as two tradesmen, with the brickwork, timberwork and window casement work all taking some time, as complex cuts needed to be made to achieve the angles embedded in both the building's plan and section. Many of the fixings were also concealed.<sup>17</sup> The design was thus truly craft-based in its construction methods and predominantly made by hand.

Oribin's St Andrew's Presbyterian Memorial Church (1961)<sup>18</sup> in Innisfail was likely the second A-frame to be built in Queensland (fig. 4).<sup>19</sup> This now state heritage listed church building<sup>20</sup> is very expressive in both form and materiality. It possesses the grandeur and immanence expected of a church building. Located on the crest of Innisfail's hilltop topography, the church's siting added to its landmark form. Also, only a short distance away from the elaborate Catholic church (c.1928), the cross atop St Andrew's used to just surpass the height of its religious neighbour.<sup>21</sup> This cross has, however, since been removed.

Patrick Bingham-Hall included St Andrew's in his pictorial compendium, *Austral Eden: 200 years of Australian architecture*, as one of only three post-war church buildings, captioning an image of its interior as "the isoscelean masterpiece of an ever-resourceful maverick architect."<sup>22</sup> Writing about Oribin's three

16 Robert McDougall (worked on the Mareeba Uniting Church building), interview by Patrick Huber, August 7, 2010, private collection.

17 McDougall, interview.

18 This church was designed in 1959, while Oribin was in partnership with Sid Barnes. A 1959 stewardship campaign was run by the congregation in 1959. The project was tendered November 4, 1959 to January 29, 1960 and the building was opened November 4, 1961 ("St Paul's Anglican Church," *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 602332, accessed September 26, 2016, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=601589>).

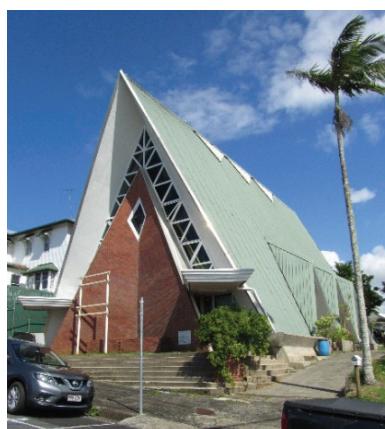
19 A. Ian Ferrier's Halifax Catholic Church (1960) was likely the first.

20 Entered December 2003 ("St Pauls Anglican Church").

21 "Illuminated cross will be landmark for Innisfail," *The Evening Advocate*, November 1, 1961, 3.

22 Bingham-Hall, *Austral Eden*, 193. Michael Dysart's c.1966 Polish War Memorial Chapel, Marayong, Sydney (NSW) and Don Gazzard's c.1965 Wentworth Chapel, Vaucluse, Sydney (NSW) are the other two.

Figure 4. Edwin Oribin, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, (1961). *Left.* Exterior of church. (Photograph by author, 2018.) *Right.* Interior of church. (Photograph courtesy of the 2018 owner, photographer unknown, undated.)



early-1960s churches, Queensland heritage architect, Margaret Lawrence-Drew, in turn, describes St Andrew's as follows:

*Oribin's organic design process (reminiscent of one of his major influences, Frank Lloyd Wright) is evident. Materials, motifs, and basic ordering principles are repeated throughout as if it were a unified organism. Isosceles triangles proliferate in every element of the building [...] Everything is related, reflecting the symbolic systems of nature.*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence-Drew, "Eddie Oribin", 48.

This preoccupation with angular geometry, was not new in Oribin's work, but built on his earlier work, including his First House (1958), and Studio (1960). It was possibly Oribin's early Cairns work that brought him to the Presbyterian Churches' attention. Andrew Leslie (Les) McKay (1909-1976), who was the minister at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cairns from 1957-1962, possibly recommended Oribin to the Innisfail congregation having seen and admired some of his earliest work.<sup>24</sup> On behalf of the congregation, McKay subsequently submitted Oribin's plans to the Presbyterian Presbytery for approval.<sup>25</sup> Then, as the newly appointed Moderator for the Presbytery of Carpentaria, McKay was invited to open the new church on the November 4, 1961.<sup>26</sup>

St Andrew's has a steel A-frame structure.<sup>27</sup> This triangle is reinterpreted throughout the varying scales of the design and in various materials. Three triangular dormer windows are embedded in both sides of the steep-ribbed aluminium-sheeted roof, which also has three triangular fibre-glass roof lights along its ridge. The glazing in the front façade is also broken into triangular panels and surrounds a triangle of brickwork, folded down its centre to pleat inwards, and with the brick coursing laid on diagonals perpendicular to the triangular panel's sides. The interior of the church expresses the A-frame structure. It is clad in timber and has folded diamond-shaped baffles suspended from the ceiling, to diffuse the sunlight streaming in through the triangular skylights. Triangular detailing is also used extensively for the building's detailing and fit-out, including for glazed details, internal lighting pelmets, fan supports, at the junctions of the timber tongue and groove ceiling and also for elements of the sanctuary furnishings.

In the late-1950s A-frame churches were popular in America, many of which received attention in architectural periodicals. Of these, the most prominent were: Eero Saarinen's Lutheran Concordia Senior College Chapel (Fort Wayne, IN, 1957); and Walter Netsch's (of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, with advice

<sup>24</sup> Biographical information provided by his daughter (the Queensland museum curator, historian and heritage consultant) Dr Judith McKay. Oribin's recommendation is speculated by Judith McKay, however, no historical records survive to verify. Judith McKay, email message to author, February 27, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Then the Presbyterian Church's equivalent term for the Catholic and Anglican's term Diocese.

<sup>26</sup> "St Paul's Anglican Church," *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 602332.

<sup>27</sup> Though originally intended to be laminated timber. See Majer, "E.H. Oribin," 91.

from Pietro Belluschi) design for the Air Force Cadets Chapel (Colorado Springs, CO, 1963 completed and opened).<sup>28</sup> St Andrew's shares many similarities with these A-frame church buildings, in particular the exploration of the triangle through the designs. In late-1950s America, the A-frame became a comfortable middle-ground—no longer historical, but also not too overtly modern.<sup>29</sup> The aforementioned two examples did, however, push the envelope well beyond the “comfortable” into the experimental, just like Oribin's St Andrew's did in Australia.<sup>30</sup> Harrison & Abramovitz, Sherwood, Mills & Smith's First Presbyterian Church, in Stamford, Connecticut (1958), with its highly experimental triangulated design, might also offer clues to Oribin's inspirations.<sup>31</sup>

### Christian Symbolism Expressed in Numbers, Materials and Form

For the Queensland Anglican Church, Longreach has long been considered both “the hub of western central Queensland and the birthplace of the Bush Brotherhood.”<sup>32</sup> A remote outpost, by road, Longreach is 1,180 kilometres north-west of Brisbane and 685 kilometres west of Rockhampton. The late-1950s saw good wool seasons, and in this time of optimism the church congregation grew from a handful to over one hundred congregants.<sup>33</sup> With a stewardship campaign and war memorial tax concessions for donations, funds for a new permanent church were quickly raised.<sup>34</sup>

The Brisbane-based architect Neville Robert Willis (1928-86) designed the new St Andrew's Church of England in Longreach (fig. 5), in close collaboration with the young rector, who had himself trained to become an architect.<sup>35</sup> Rector John Bayton (b.1930) studied architecture at the University of Queensland

<sup>28</sup> The chapel by Saarinen was published as early as 1954: “An Old Village Silhouette,” *Architectural Forum* (December 1954): 132-36. Many periodicals featured this chapel in manufacturer's advertisements. The Netsch scheme was published in: “Air Academy Chapel: New Design, Old Controversy,” *Architectural Record* (September 1957): cover, 10-12; “Chapel of the Air,” *Architectural Forum* (September 1957): 136-37.

<sup>29</sup> Buggeln, *The Suburban Church*, 106-107.

<sup>30</sup> Another and earlier Australian example is the Geelong Grammar School Chapel (c.1958) in Timbertop, Vic., published completed in a VisQueen advert in *Architecture in Australia* 48, no. 1 (January-March 1959), 5; *Cross-Section*, 77 (March 1959), 3; “Chapel, Geelong Grammar School Preparatory College, Timbertop, near Mansfield,” *Architecture in Australia* 48, no. 2, (June 1959), 91-92.

<sup>31</sup> Published in *Architectural Forum* (April 1958), 103-106.

<sup>32</sup> “Parish of Longreach,” accessed February 2019, <http://anglicanchurchcq.org.au/longreach.html> The Bush Brotherhoods were setup in sparsely-populated, inland, rural Australia as missions by the Church of England and served by clergy who took vows of poverty. These areas of the country were unable to economically operate as parishes (pay or attract a parish priest). For a history of the Bush Brotherhoods, refer: J.W.S. Tomlin, *The Story of the Bush Brotherhoods* (London and Oxford: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1949).

<sup>33</sup> Bishop John Bayton, interviewed by Lisa Daunt March 13, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Bayton, interview.

Figure 5. Neville R Willis, St Andrew's Church of England, Longreach (1960). *Left*. Exterior street view. *Right*. Interior of church. (Photographs by author, 2018.)



and Central Technical College, graduating from the degree course in 1958, and designed the Kenilworth Church of England (1955) while studying architecture.<sup>36</sup> Concurrently pursuing his interests in theology and iconography, he studied for priesthood at St Francis Seminary (Milton, Brisbane), and was ordained as a Church of England priest in 1957.<sup>37</sup> As rector at Longreach from 1958-1963, Bayton prepared the initial design for the new church, and then, at the Bishop's request, commissioned a registered architect.<sup>38</sup> He commissioned his good friend Willis to complete the design, but continued to follow the project closely through the documentation and construction phases.<sup>39</sup> Together, Bayton and Willis sought to reinvent many of the building features that had become a staple of traditional Anglican ecclesiastic design. They, for instance, eliminated the church chancel and reconsidered the processional sequencing. The foundation stone of St Andrew's Church of England was laid October 4, 1959, and the building was opened and dedicated on the December 11, 1960. Mid-construction, Bayton wrote in the Rockhampton Church of England diocese monthly:

*It is a great venture and a tremendous thrill to see something which was originally a few lines on a piece of scrap paper take shape in the mass of steel, concrete, brick and aluminium thrusting its way heavenward. To my knowledge it will pioneer something completely new [...] in Church architecture in Australia.*<sup>40</sup>

Like Mareeba Methodist, the design of St Andrew's was an early shift away from the then typical rectilinear basilica-plan churches in Queensland. It was also one of the first church buildings in Queensland to be airconditioned.<sup>41</sup> It shared some similarities with St Faith's Church of England in Burwood, Victoria (1958), both in terms of design and materiality. This church was designed by Mockridge Stahle and Mitchell a few years earlier and was published in Australian architectural periodicals soon after its completion.<sup>42</sup> It was likely seen as a benchmark for modern church design by Bayton and Willis. Its plan shape, the arrangement of its worship space, its building form, and even its materiality are similar (fig. 6). St Faith's was state heritage listed in Victoria in 2010.<sup>43</sup> As noted by architectural historian Philip Goad, "The Anglican Diocese [of Melbourne] initially rejected Mockridge's unusual design, but finally accepted it on the grounds that it was located in a side street and not on a public thoroughfare!"<sup>44</sup> It is likely that in St Andrew's case also the limited exposure of the church—due to the remoteness of its location (in Longreach)—played a

35 Willis designed at least five Queensland churches for his own practice, and likely worked on others for Frank L. Cullen. Willis was a registered architect from December 24, 1956 until 1980. From 1957 until 1958 he worked for Cullen. Then from 1959 until 1971 he practiced under his own name, at East Brisbane, and from 1972 until 1979 with Peter Heathwood as Heathwood, Willis & Partners (birth record accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.familyhistory.bdm.qld.gov.au/>; Donald Watson, *Rolls of the Board of Architects Queensland, 1930-1980*. (The University of Queensland Library, Data Collection, 2017), accessed December 10, 2018 <https://doi.org/10.14264/uql.2017.123>).

36 Bayton, interview; Jonathan Charles Holland, "The Past is a Foreign Country: A History of the Church of England in the Diocese of Brisbane, 1950-1970" (PhD diss., Central Queensland University, 2006), 209 (citing 2004 communications with Brayton).

37 "The Village Update," accessed May 19, 2018, <https://www.thevillage.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Yeronga-Newsletter-Summer-2016.pdf>; "The Rt. Rev. John Bayton," accessed November 30, 2018, [https://www.day1.org/313-the\\_rt\\_rev\\_john\\_bayton](https://www.day1.org/313-the_rt_rev_john_bayton); Michael Rogers (Archivist, Anglican Church of South Queensland, Records and Archives Centre), personal communication to the author, February 13, 2019.

38 Bayton, interview.

39 Bayton, interview.

40 The Revd. J. Bayton, "Longreach," *The Church Gazette* (February 1960): 18.

41 St Stephen's Church of England (1958) in Coorparoo (Brisbane) may have been the first.

42 *Cross-Section*, 71 (September 1958), 1; and then "St. Faith's, Burwood," *Architecture in Australia* 48 no. 2 (June 1959): 92, 94-7; "St. Faith's Chruch, Burwood, Victoria," *Architecture Today* (January 1959): cover, 24-27; and "Churches ... a creative outlet," *Building and Decorating Materials* (November/December 1959): 45-6 and (January/February 1960): 28, 36.

43 Colin Holden, "Anglicanism, the Visual Arts and Architecture," in *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, ed. Bruce Kaye (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 263; Elizabeth Richardson, "Negotiating Modernism: How Church Designs of the Postwar Era Negotiated Modernism in an Attempt to Renew Their Image and Relevance Within an Increasingly Secular Society," *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 34, Quotation: What Does Architectural History Have in Store for Architecture Today, ed. Gevork Hartoonian and John Ting (Canberra: SAHANZ, 2017), 607-18; and "St Faith's Anglican Church," *Victorian Heritage Register*, listing H2254, accessed February 16, 2019, <https://vhf.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/45050>.

44 Philip Goad, *Melbourne Architecture* (Sydney: The Watermark Press, 1999), 182.

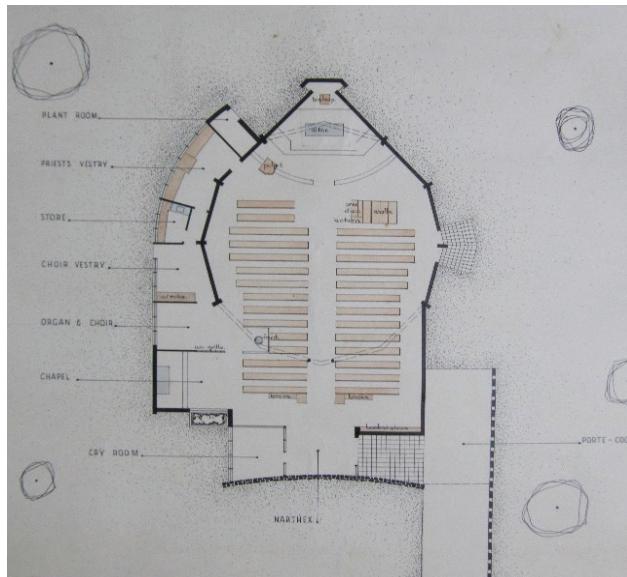


Figure 6. St Andrew's Church of England, Longreach, (1960). Floor plan. (Drawing courtesy of the Rockhampton Diocese Anglican Archives, undated.)

role in gaining diocesan approval, because, unlike St Faith's, St Andrew's unusual design was not challenged during the approval process.<sup>45</sup>

St Andrew's worship space has a dodecagon roof, with a 12-bulb bespoke light fitting suspended from the domed ceiling—the twelve apostles purported to be symbolised in the design of both roof shape and light fitting.<sup>46</sup> Similar light fittings are contained along the nave of Mockridge, Stahle and Mitchell's *The Mother of God, East Ivanhoe (Melbourne, Victoria)*, which was also published in 1958.<sup>47</sup>

## Expressive Pleats and Folds

The Bush brotherhood were also integral to the creation and post-war viability of the Cunnamulla parish of the Church of England. Located over 800 kilometres drive from Brisbane, in south-west Queensland, "this huge parish stretches over 40,000 square miles [103,600 square kilometres] of S.W Queensland from the Nebine River to the South Australian border in the Sturt's Stony Desert."<sup>48</sup> All four churches in the parish were built between 1955 and 1965.<sup>49</sup>

The St Albans Church of England Bush Brotherhood Church in Cunnamulla was designed by John Muir Morton (1933–2009) of Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen (fig. 7) in the early-1960s.<sup>50</sup> It is another very expressive (and also quite monumental) exemplar early-1960s regional Queensland church, described by the historian Thom Blake in 1979 as an "unusual

<sup>45</sup> Bayton, interview.

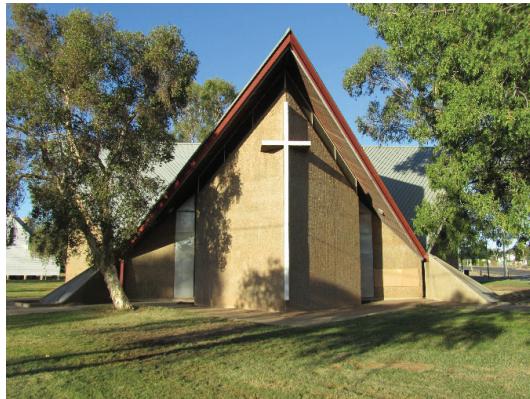
<sup>46</sup> Bayton, interview.

<sup>47</sup> "Church of The Mother of God, East Ivanhoe, Melb.," *Architecture in Australia* 47, no. 2, (April-June 1958): 48-49.

<sup>48</sup> "Brotherhood church to be consecrated after drought years," 1974 newspaper article (source unknown, page unknown), Cunnamulla Parish File, Brisbane Anglican Archdiocese archives, Brisbane.

<sup>49</sup> "St Albans Cunnamulla Parish Profile, 1990," Cunnamulla Parish File, Brisbane Anglican Archdiocese archives, Brisbane.

<sup>50</sup> Gail Lipske, *St Albans' Anglican Church Cunnamulla, A Short History* (Toowoomba: Conservation Management Planners & Associates, January 2005), 4; October 1961 drawing signed by John Morton (Copy of held at St Albans' Cunnamulla); Thom W. Blake, *Cunnamulla 1879-1979, A Centenary of Local Government* (Cunnamulla, Qld.: Paroo Shire Council, 1979), 50; 2010 his wife advised that he had passed in 2009 (Toni Condon (Senior Administration Officer, Board of Architects of Queensland) personal communication to the author, March 8, 2019).



design [...] surely must be one of the most outstanding buildings in western Queensland," and recently (2017) received an enduring architecture award from the RAIA (Queensland Chapter).<sup>51</sup> Quoting *Cross-Section*, the jury commended the design's "vigorous and carefully conceived design, in structure, finishes and attention to climate control."<sup>52</sup> Climate control was indeed very important for the architects, who in 1963 described themselves as "climate consultants" in relation to the design of this church, making no mention of its liturgical function or its expressive form.<sup>53</sup> Born and trained as an architect in Britain, Morton immigrated to Queensland in 1957.<sup>54</sup> There, he worked in the Brisbane office of Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen, and from the early-1960s also in their Townsville office, where he became known for his climatically responsive designs.<sup>55</sup>

St Alban's roof was conceived as a steel framed "parasol."<sup>56</sup> The ridge outlined a cross, from which the roof was folded into four gables that stretch out over the corners of the in situ-concrete walls below. The plan was created by juxtaposing two squares at forty-five degrees to each other, resulting in four tall corners emphasised by the roofs gables that protect them (fig. 8). The other four corners are sheltered under the steep valley gutters. Completing the strong roof form, the valley gutters are guided to the ground by four concrete drainage plinths, which are very strong design features in their own right. The entry narthex, where the baptismal font is also located, the choir, the vestry and the sanctuary are all positioned under one of these four tall corners. Seating is arranged with a processional centre aisle within a wide, column-free space. A gallery with more seating is located over the entry narthex. Inside, the roof form is expressed through the main steel beam, with timber battens cladding the ceiling between them.

Figure 7. Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen, St Alban's Church of England, Cunnamulla, (1963). Left. Exterior of church. Right. Interior of church. (Photographs by author, 2018.)

51 Blake, *Cunnamulla 1879-1979*, 50.

52 "Bush Brotherhood Church, Cunamulla, Q'land," *Cross-Section* 130 (August 1963), 4.

53 "Bush Brotherhood Church, Cunamulla, Q'land," 4.

54 Morton studied the five-year full-time diploma course at the Victoria University of Manchester from October 1951 to June 1956. He immigrated to Australia as passenger 1057 on the Orion from the United Kingdom ("Morton John Muir Application for Registration as an architect 558," Queensland Board of Architects, copy of application supplied to the author May 7, 2019); "Kinkabool, Surfers Paradise," *Queensland Heritage Register*, listing 601477, accessed February 1, 2019, <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/heritage-register/detail/?id=601477>; passenger records accessed February 18, 2019 at [https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=30132118&S=13&N=20&R=0#](https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=30132118&S=13&N=20&R=0#/)/; further passenger records accessed February 28, 2019 at <https://www.findmypast.com.au>.

55 Don Watson, "Ford Hutton & Newell," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, ed. Goad and Willis, 260.

56 "Bush Brotherhood Church, Cunamulla, Q'land," 4.

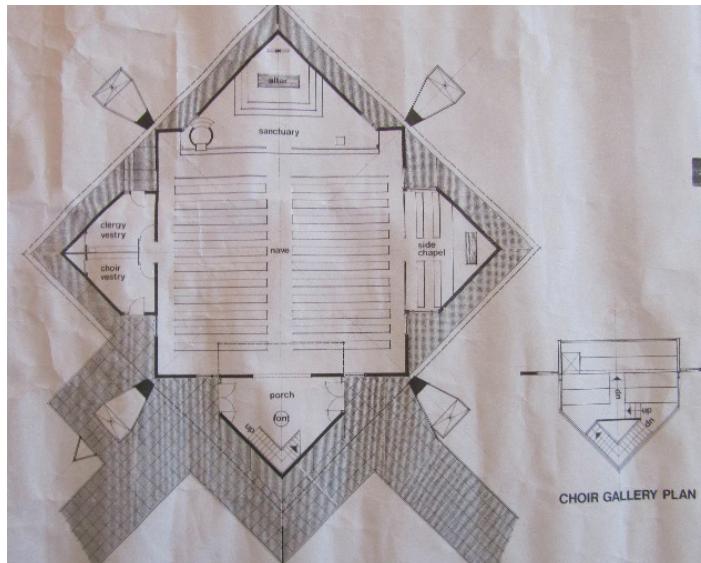


Figure 8. St Alban's Church of England. Floor plan dated October 1961. Part of drawing held at St Alban's Cunnamulla. (Photograph by author, 2018.)

In 2004 former resident of Cunnamulla and heritage consultant, Gail Lipke, prepared a conservation management plan and a short history for St Alban's.<sup>57</sup> For Lipke, St Alban's has an “almost ‘foreign’ appearance,” not only “in the landscape of Cunnamulla [but in] rural Queensland as a whole.”<sup>58</sup> Within her short history, Lipke recorded the struggle “to deliver the Christian faith to the people living in isolated areas of this vast state,” which was particularly evident in Cunnamulla, in spite of the efforts of the Bush Brotherhood.<sup>59</sup> Even when, after World War II, transportation and roads improved greatly, enhancing the accessibility to many areas in the state, it remained hard to attract a minister and retain one at Cunnamulla, also because of the state’s declining clergy numbers.<sup>60</sup>

The new Cunnamulla church was built on the back of the 1950s wool boom, but after the mid-1950s shearers’ strike, a late-1950s stewardship program (which brought in the first \$30,000), added to the area’s cultural and social life with fetes, race days and dinners, and to the funds from collection plate and door knock takings.<sup>61</sup> A bank loan was obtained for the remainder (a further \$43,000, inclusive of interest paid).<sup>62</sup> Brother Barry Russell Hunter (1927-2015) was the minister at Cunnamulla from 1956-61 and was “instrumental in the push for the new church and developed many of the fund raising ventures.”<sup>63</sup>

Acceptance of the architect’s modern design by the church committee and congregation was not without hesitation. In the minutes of the Wardens Meeting held on April, 21, 1960, its Chairman, Bob Hobson, is recorded as saying:

<sup>57</sup> Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> As also noted in Blake, *Cunnamulla 1879-1979*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> “Brotherhood church to be consecrated after drought years,” page unknown; Blake, *Cunnamulla 1879-1979*, 42; Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 14.

<sup>62</sup> The loan was paid off by 1974 though not without challenge as the community went through one of the worst droughts and also saw a dramatic population decline. The construction cost was £27,122, plus another £3,000 for professional fees (Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15, citing the April-May 1963 Brotherhood of St Paul’s Chapter Meeting, Quilpie-Cunnamulla District).

<sup>63</sup> Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 16; Blake, *Cunnamulla 1879-1979*, 50; Michael Rogers, personal communication with author, February 27, 2019; “Barry Hunter.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 30, 2015, accessed February 27, 2019 <http://tributes.smh.com.au/obituaries/smh-au/obituary.aspx?n=barry-hunter&pid=175390644>.

*A plan, submitted by our architects for the new Church, has not met with enthusiastic approval, and we are still awaiting a representative of the firm to explain the plan to us in more detail, and also submit alternatives. We have such a wonderful site for the church in Cunnamulla that this matter must be given very careful consideration.*<sup>64</sup>

The scheme in question shared a strong resemblance with the final scheme but had only one gable roof on the diagonal across a square plan with garden inserted on either side.<sup>65</sup> This scheme was simpler than the one eventually built. Subsequent to the Church committee's requests, Morton and the office's directors visited Cunnamulla.<sup>66</sup> In 2004 for Lipke's short history, Morton recalled that "a week of meetings and persuasive argument got the Parish Council and Building Committee members to agree on a [sic] extremely contemporary plan and building materials."<sup>67</sup> Morton described the design as a "meeting place," rather than a "Church" and also "an experimentation of sorts."<sup>68</sup> In September 1960 the Parochial Council approved the submitted design, noting in the 1961 Parochial Council meetings minutes that:

*The design presented was accepted "although of unusual design" was enthusiastically received and unanimously approved [...] However, due to the weather conditions and with no break in the drought conditions it was agreed that building be deferred until at least March. However, this may be optimistic as of the £30,000 there was only £13,000 in hand, the balance to be borrowed over five years.*<sup>69</sup>

Tenders were called in November 1961 and awarded to the Cunnamulla building firm John W Thompson & Co's.<sup>70</sup> The foundation stone was laid April 1, 1962, and the church was dedicated on May 2, 1963.<sup>71</sup> In July 1963, *The Church Chronicle*, in a short article titled "Unusual Western Church" announced "still another outstanding Church in a contemporary architectural style, was dedicated."<sup>72</sup>

We can now only speculate about the design influences of St Alban's. A number of earlier overseas church buildings exist that were similar in form and architectural expression and were published. These include: St Francis of Assisi Church, Weston, Connecticut by Joseph Salerno; and the Congregation Beth El Synagogue, South Orange, New Jersey, by Davis, Brody and Wisniewski.<sup>73</sup> Like St Alban's both these designs have steep roofs with four expressive roof gables.

64 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 14-15.

65 Lund Hutton Newell, Black & Paulsen, "Proposed Church, St Alban's C Of E, Cunnamulla," dyeline print of a May 4, 1960 drawing, *Lund, Hutton, Ryan, Morton Collection*, QFL211, job 1.374, University of Queensland Fryer Library, St Lucia. This drawing is initialled MH (Maurice Hurst?). An earlier unbuilt scheme, dated February 1955 and initialled by IAB (Ian Black?), is also held in this archival collection—a scheme with an elongated basilica plan, similar to the built Christ Church, Church of England, in St George (1960), designed by Neville Willis.

66 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15, citing communication with Morton, August 2004.

67 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15.

68 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15.

69 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15, citing the St Alban's Report, April 1961.

70 Lipke, *St Alban's Anglican Church Cunnamulla*, 15.

71 Brass plaque inside church entry narthex, sighted by the author May 13, 2018.

72 "Unusual Western Church," *The Church Chronicle* (July 1, 1963): 12.

73 "St. Francis of Assisi Church, Weston, Conn.," *Architectural Record* (June 1956): 202-205; "Synagogue for Congregation Beth El," *Architectural Record* (December 1958): 152-56.

## Conclusion

Despite their remoteness from Brisbane, as well as other, more accessible urban centralities interstate, and also from other international locations where ideas regarding progressive (liturgically-rethought) ecclesiastical design originated and were first tested, the four regional churches in post-war Queensland discussed in this paper exhibit a keen awareness of such ideas. Within their small remote communities Oribin's Mareeba Methodist (1960) and his Innisfail Presbyterian (1961), as well as Willis' St Andrew's Church of England in Longreach (1960), and Lund Hutton Newell Black and Paulsen's St Alban's Church of England in Cunnamulla (1963) were (and still are) architectural beacons of their post-war congregations' faith. Youth and an eagerness to emulate modern and inventive church buildings abroad and interstate spurred architects and their clients to bring these new ideas to Queensland's regional townships. As architectural and religious periodicals from abroad and nationally became more available, between 1955 and 1965 there was a greater transfer of ideas, both nationally and internationally.

While geographical distance may have delayed the realisation of permanent church buildings in regional Queensland prior to the mid-1950s, afterwards it may have become its biggest boon. Amidst the optimism of the post-war church building boom (1955-65) this geographical distance allowed architects and congregations to realise some of the state's most inventive and experimental works of ecclesiastical architecture; which were likely easier to realise in Queensland's remote bush than in Brisbane's suburbs.

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