

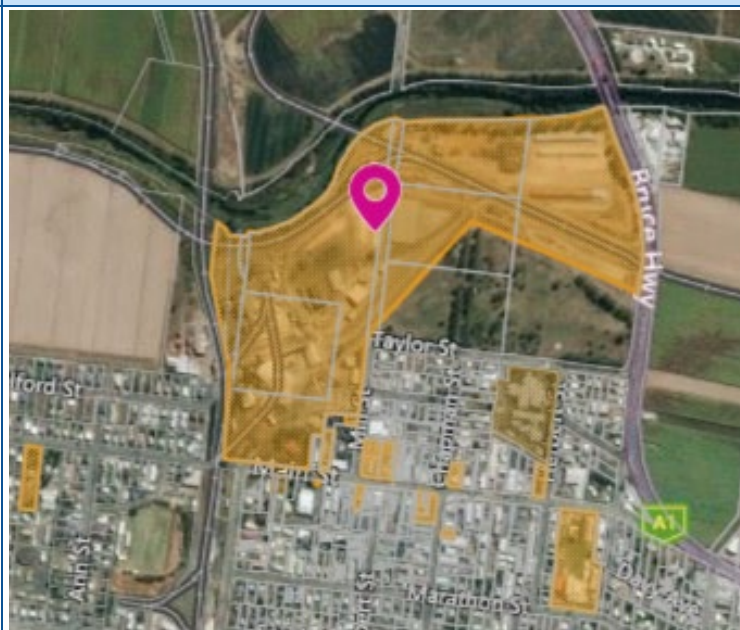
PROSERPINE SUGAR MILL

Address	Main Street, Proserpine
Lot Plan	198HR1896, 1RL6858, 1RP706462, 37RP702840, 38RP702840, 39RP702840, 3RP706180, 4RP726971, 7RP706105
Coordinates	20°23'58.9"S, 148°34'47.9"E
Integrity	Good
Condition	Good
Statutory Listings	Nil
Non-Statutory Listings	Nil
References	Kerr, John, 1997. A Crystal Century. The History of Proserpine's Sugar Mill, its Farms and its People, Proserpine Cooperative Sugar Milling Association Limited, Proserpine. McClements, Mavis, 1974-75 "A Town Called Proserpine", Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, v. IX, n. 6 www.wilmar.com.au

Street View



Location Map



Physical Description

The Proserpine Sugar Mill is located in the north of the Proserpine Central Business District bounded by Main Street to the south, Mill Street and parkland to the east and the railway line in the west. The site extends towards the Proserpine River to the north.

The milling infrastructure occupies most of the fenced site, but there are some landscaped sections with grassed areas and mature trees in the south along Main Street and in the vicinity of the former Mine Manager's house (now demolished) as well as a mature mango tree at the entrance, a reported former meeting place for the workers and their partners at shift change. Adjacent to the Main Street entrance is a memorial planting of a Proserpine bottle tree dedicated to a former mill worker killed in a work accident on the anniversary of his death in 2012.

The complex consists of a number of elements including milling, tanks, storage, railway infrastructure, weighing, work and storage sheds, administration and associated buildings. Most of the infrastructure is of varying periods, but primarily post 1950. An example of an extant early building is the former paymaster office built in c1910.

The smokestacks and concentration of the mill shed structures are located to the southwestern part of the site. Railway tracks extend from the southwestern corner of the site and wrap up around the mill sheds to the east. Multiple tracks then loop around other infrastructure to the northeast corner of the site.

Historical Context

The Proserpine Sugar Mill was established in 1897 and it is responsible for the presence, and development, of the town and former Shire of Proserpine. The first sugar plantations – each self-contained with its own mill and workforce – appeared in the Proserpine district in the early 1870s, although cattle stations predominated at this time. The first registered sugar company in the district, the Crystal Brook Sugar Company Limited, was registered in 1882 and its plantation estate was named Glen Isla. The company relied primarily on South Sea Islander and Chinese labour; despite its indentured work force, the company collapsed in 1885, primarily due to a plunge in world sugar prices.

Plantations eventually gave way to the central mill system, where cane farmers grew cane and the mill harvested and processed the cane for export. The central mill system was supported by the Queensland government, in particular through the guarantee of loans for the establishment of the mills. Interest in the prospects of the district was strong, and the Proserpine Central Mill Company was registered in 1894. The mill was constructed by 1897, along with a wharf on the Proserpine River and a tram network to haul the cane from the farms to the mill. The population of the district increased substantially due to the establishment of the mill and the town of Proserpine was surveyed. Proserpine thus came into existence because of the mill; the mill even provided land for the police station and post office. Despite confidence in the mill, it could not repay its debt and the Queensland government assumed management of the mill in conjunction with the company. The mill was still unable to clear its debt despite government intervention and the mill was foreclosed in 1904. The government was now the effective owner of the mill, but it did not want to assume direct ownership. In 1914, the district's cane growers voted to purchase the mill, eventually gaining control in 1931 as the Proserpine Co-operative Sugar Milling Association Limited. The mill continued to operate despite its financial difficulties and it eventually paid off its debt to the government. Work began on a railway linking Proserpine with the port of Bowen in 1908 and such was the significance of the railway – and by extension the mill – the residents of Proserpine did not want to support the railway unless they could become their own shire. The Proserpine Shire Council met for the first time in 1910.

The mill buildings and equipment have changed substantially over time as new equipment was installed and operations expanded to process larger crop yields. The importance of the sugar industry to Proserpine was also reflected in the construction of the Peter Faust Dam, otherwise known as Lake Proserpine, in 1990. The Association also purchased the Whitsunday Wanderers resort at Airlie Beach in 1985 in order to diversify its operations. Due to financial difficulties the Proserpine Sugar Mill was sold to Sucrogen in 2011. Wilmar International purchased Sucrogen in 2013 and currently operates the site as Wilmar Sugar.

Historical Significance

Criteria A - *the place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the region's history*

The Proserpine Sugar Mill is important in demonstrating the evolution of the region's history. The establishment of the sugar mill led to the survey and settlement of the town of Proserpine and, shortly after, the creation of the Shire of Proserpine. The sugar industry remains the principal industry of the region and important to Queensland. The sugar mill also represents the broader history of sugar in the region, including the creation of sugar plantations in the 1880s (prior to the central mill system) and the use of South Sea Islander and Chinese labour in the sugar industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Criteria C - *the place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history*

There has been substantial change over time to the mill and its operations. Nonetheless, the mill remains in its original location and therefore there is potential for archaeological material that reflects earlier phases of operations and associated structures, including the period prior to the mill's construction.

Criteria D - *the place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics*

The Proserpine Sugar Mill is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a sugar mill, with substantial changes to fabric and machinery over time to ensure the mill remains technologically up to date.

<i>of a particular class of cultural places</i>	
Criteria E - <i>the place is important because of its aesthetic significance</i>	The Proserpine Sugar Mill is important to the region because of its aesthetic significance. The mill dominates the town of Proserpine and the surrounding landscape. Its buildings and smokestacks in particular provide landmark qualities that can be viewed from virtually every direction on the approach to Proserpine. Moreover, the mill stands at the centre of a vast network of sugar farms and tram networks; thus, the operations of the mill continue to conserve an agricultural landscape that has defined the history of Proserpine since its establishment in the late nineteenth century.
Criteria H - <i>the place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in the region's history</i>	The Proserpine Sugar Mill has a special association with the Proserpine Cooperative Sugar Milling Association Limited and its workers. The Association represented the cane farmers of the district who took over management of the mill following its foreclosure in the early 1900s.



