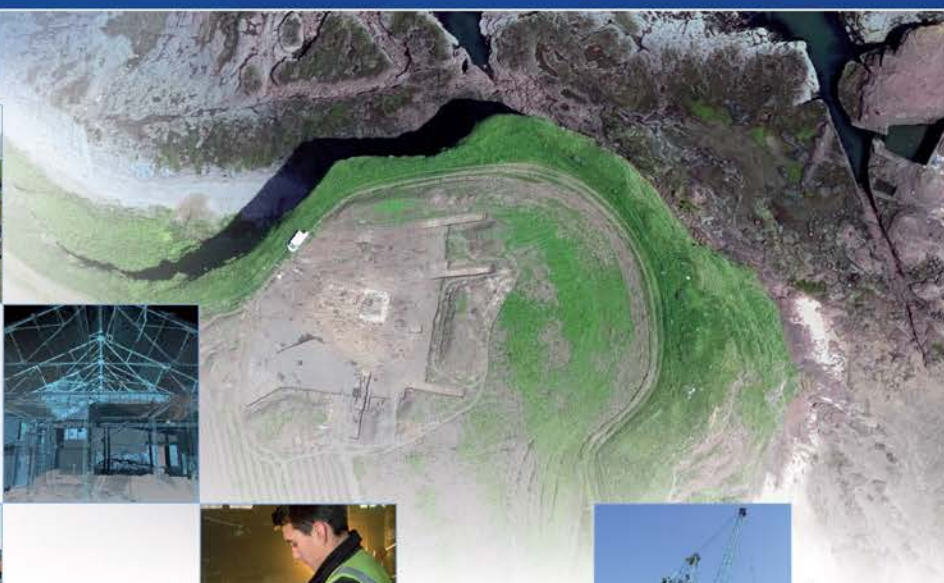


# St Paul's Church, 4 Muirhouse Avenue, Edinburgh: Historic Building Recording Report

AOC Project: 23504

30<sup>th</sup> June 2016









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### *Summary*

*AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Robert Mackenzie to undertake an historic building record of the former Roman Catholic St Paul's Church, 4 Muirhouse Avenue, Edinburgh, prior to the demolition of the building to construct new dwellings. The works were required as a condition of planning consent.*

*The church was constructed in 1968 and designed by architect Peter Rice Whitson in an international modernist style in brick with a roughcast render over a steel superstructure. The main church building was to the east with a small vestibule and narthex to either side to the south, a large chapel space to the centre and another activity room to the north side. The church linked into a flat-roofed block containing living quarters to the west of the site. In 2014, a fire gutted the building rendering it unusable, and the roof of the chapel was removed.*

*No further historic building survey is considered necessary prior to development, although this will need to be confirmed by the CEC Archaeology Service on behalf of the CEC.*



## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Robert Mackenzie to undertake an historic building survey of the former Roman Catholic St Paul's Church, 4 Muirhouse Avenue, Edinburgh, in advance of demolition of the building to make way for a new development. The works have been completed as part of an archaeological planning condition (Planning Ref: 15/05556/FUL). The extent of the works was defined by the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) as advised by the City of Edinburgh Council Archaeology Service (CECAS) and consisted of a written, drawn and photographic record of the building prior to development.

### 1.2 Site Location

- 1.2.1 St Paul's Church is located on the west side of Pennywell Road at No 4 Muirhouse Avenue in the district of Muirhouse which is located to the north-west of the city of Edinburgh. The church is centred on NGR: NT 21949 75995 (Figure 1).

## 2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The main objective of the historic building recording survey was to create a 'preservation by record' of the building in advance of planned demolition through photographic and written record.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 A 'Level 1' historic building survey (as defined by Historic England, 2016) was undertaken on the building which consisted of a detailed written and photographic record preceded by an element of archive research.

### 3.2 Photographic record

- 3.2.1 A general exterior photographic survey was undertaken of the building in black and white print and colour digital using a 35mm SLR and digital SLR respectively. Photographs were taken of the building within its setting, as well as each elevation in either head-on or oblique views. A discreetly placed 2m ranging pole was placed in all shots where access and health and safety allowed for scale. A register of photographs was taken on site which can also be found in Appendix 1. A selection of digital photographs has been used as plates to illustrate this report.

### 3.3 Written record

- 3.3.1 A written survey was undertaken of the exterior using AOC *pro forma* recording sheets with comment on condition, construction, architectural features, fixtures and fittings, modern interventions, evidence for phasing and function and anything else pertinent to the historic record.



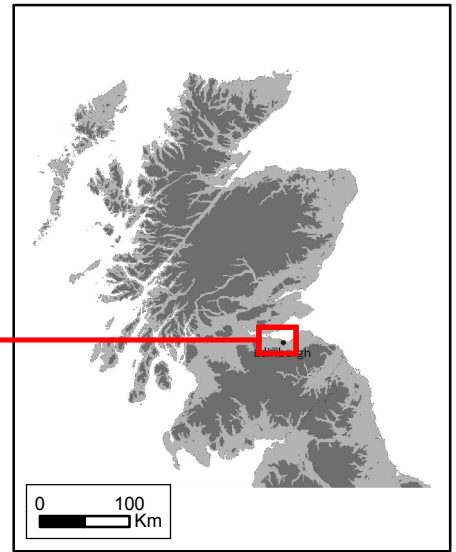
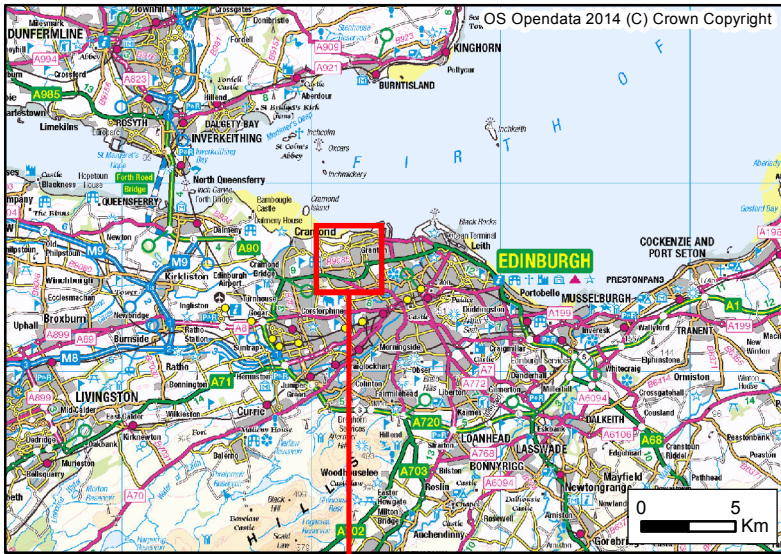


Figure 1: Site Location Plan



## 4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Prior to the construction of the church, the area of Muirhouse was largely open fields, and Pennywell Road has in fact been a thoroughfare since at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The farmhouse of West Pilton can be seen in the historic mapping to the east side of the road since at least the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.2 In the later 1940s, a large number of pre-fabricated post-war housing was built at Muirhouse, and West Pilton Farm was demolished. The new housing consisted of a vast number of small rectangular dwellings neatly arranged in rows to the north of Muirhouse Avenue. On the site of the church, 16 small houses were located to the roadside at Muirhouse Avenue, Muirhouse Crescent, Muirhouse Place and Pennywell Road, with gardens to the centre of the plot. In 1968, these were demolished to make way for the new church, which was to have Roman Catholic denomination. It was designed by Peter Rice Whitson (1912 – 1999), an Edinburgh architect born in Leith into a strict Roman Catholic family (DoSA 2015). He was stationed in India with the Royal Engineers during the Second World War and, in 1946, was appointed Chief Architect to the Scottish Special Housing Association, building homes for returning servicemen. However, he left this post in 1950 amid concerns of increasing numbers of high-rise blocks being built to solve the housing crisis instead of smaller homes (*ibid*). Upon his departure, he went into private practice (eventually becoming Peter Rice and partners by the 1960s), concentrating on ecclesiastical architecture. St Paul's is one of many he designed in Edinburgh and throughout Scotland, including Sancta Maria Abbey, Nunraw (1951), St Anthony's Church, Rutherglen (1968) and Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, Scotstounhill, Glasgow (1969). He also served as a Senior Lecturer at the Edinburgh College of Art (*ibid*).
- 4.3 The church suffered a devastating fire in 2014, which gutted the entire interior of the building so that it is now a brick shell (BBC News 2014). However, the roughcast exterior survived relatively intact.

## 5 RESULTS

- 5.1 The church consists of two distinct elements, the Chapel to the east side and living quarters and a hall to the west side, both constructed of brick with white painted roughcast render (Figures 2 & 3; Plates 1 - 7). The main chapel space is double height in size and defined by two roofs, with the northern pitch rising higher than the southern pitch with a range of small windows to the south pitch to add more light to the interior space. The main vestibule to the southern side also has a sharp angle roof set slightly apart from, and sloping down to, the main chapel area, with a main entrance consisting of two double doors with tall lights above (now boarded over) (Plate 8). Additional windows feature throughout the vestibule and chapel to add even more discreet lighting, including a window to the two narthexes (Plate 9). The rear north side of the church consists of a separate activity room, accessed from the chapel. This is also double height in size, the roof sloping upwards to the north, containing six large rectangular windows halfway up the elevation (Plates 10 & 11). The remains of the brick build, sarking boards and steel beam infrastructure can today be seen from a distance due to the removal of the roof after the fire (Plate 12).
- 5.2 The west side of the church consists of a number of bedrooms, studies, bathrooms, kitchen, sitting room and hall, all centred around an off-set courtyard (Figure 3). It is largely a flat-roofed single storey block, although the steeply pitched half-roofs were echoed here with a half pitch to the west wing (Plate 13) and a smaller half-pitch over the boiler room with a chimney (Plate 14).
- 5.3 No access was made to the interior of the building during the on-site survey, as the interior has effectively been gutted after the 2014 fire. However, members of the community have kindly given permission to include a photograph of the interior of the church whilst it was still in use (Plate 15). It shows the building was bare to the brick walls to the interior with heavy use of pine timber panelling throughout.



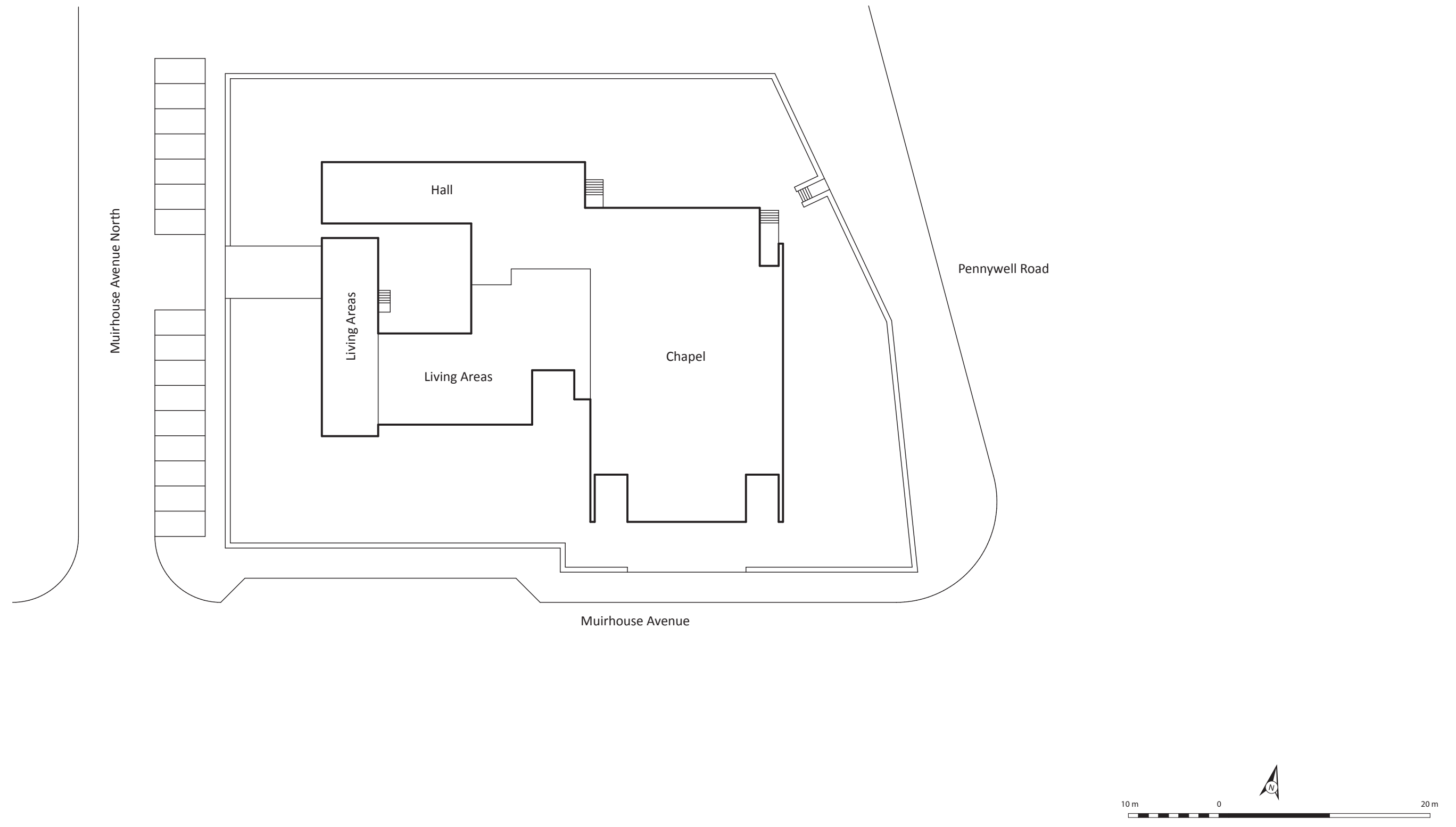


Figure 2: St Paul's Church, site plan (provided by client, Robert Mackenzie)



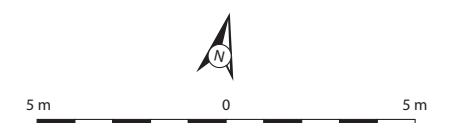
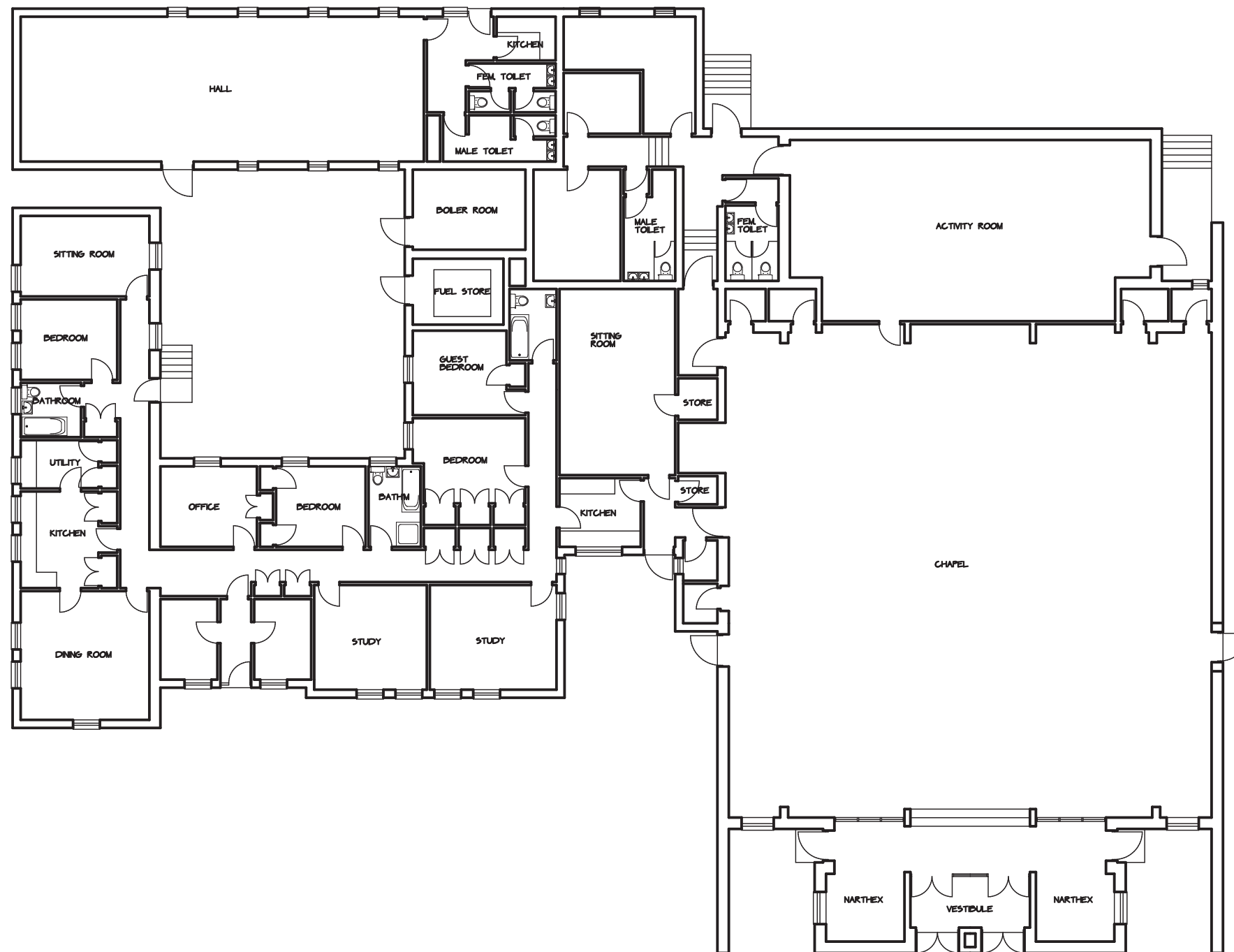


Figure 3: St Paul's Church, ground floor plan (provided by client, Robert Mackenzie) **AOC** Archaeology Group





Plate 1: St Paul's Church, general view from the south-west



Plate 2: St Paul's Church, general view from the SSW





Plate 3: St Paul's Church, general view from the south-east



Plate 4: St Paul's Church, general view from the east





Plate 5: St Paul's Church, living areas, general view from the north-west



Plate 6: St Paul's Church, living areas and hall, general view of the west elevation from the north-west





Plate 7: St Paul's Church, hall, general view of the north elevation from the north-west



Plate 8: St Paul's Church, detail of the main entrance in the south elevation, from the south





Plate 9: St Paul's Church, detail of the east-facing elevation of the main entrance from the east



Plate 10: St Paul's Church, general view of the north elevation from the north-west





Plate 11: St Paul's Church, general view of the north elevation from the north



Plate 12: St Paul's Church, detail of exposed roof showing structural steel and brick, from the NNW





Plate 13: St Paul's Church, living areas, general view of the southern block from the south-east



Plate 14: St Paul's Church, living areas, detail of the linking block between the church and the living areas (note half-pitched roof of the boiler house behind), from the SSE





Plate 15: St Paul's Church, general view of the interior of the main chapel before the 2014 fire from the east (© Lorraine McTigue)



## 6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The post-War housing development at Muirhouse was part of a much wider nationwide scheme by the new labour government to create public housing on an unprecedented scale never before seen in the UK. With these vast suburban landscapes became the need to cater for all denominations of worship, and into the late 1940s – 1960s large churches were built for all faiths. However, the church-building programme of this period could no longer match the cost of the building materials and skilled workmanship of the pre-War architecture and thus cheaper materials and more innovative designs (to make the best cost-effective use of space) were introduced. This, combined with the emergence of post-modernist and 'international modern' architecture, saw a radical move away from all traditional church building methods that had gone before it (Hume 2004). Churches were erected quickly and using the cheapest of building materials such as brick with a steel superstructure – as at St Paul's – with a roughcast render to give them a clean polished feel. Their design reflected the traditional need to be prominent and easily noticeable in the immediate environs, harking back to the rising church clock tower, although as a clock tower was no longer needed – or practical – the architectural style of these churches saw sweeping rises and walls to create vast hall-like structures inside. Light was concentrated on the upper areas of churches and in large expanses of glass, which were now possible given the advances in structural engineering and materials. No true definitive church architecture handbook was adhered to after the War, and St Paul's is one of many designs that emerged in this late 20<sup>th</sup> century period.
- 6.2 In 2014, a fire gutted the building rendering it unusable, and the roof of the chapel was removed. The development will see the demolition of the church to make way for a new housing development.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 No further historic building survey is considered necessary prior to development, although this will need to be confirmed by the CEC Archaeology Service on behalf of the CEC.



## 8 REFERENCES

### 8.1 Bibliographical references

BBC News 2014 *Teenager Charged Over Fire At St Paul's Church*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-30342808>, Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Historic England 2016 *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice*, <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/understanding-historic-buildings/>, Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Hume, J 2004 *Post-War Churches in Scotland: Breaking The Mould*.  
<https://www.scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk/explore-our-churches/exploring-with-essays/post-war-churches-in-scotland/>, Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Maguire, R 2002 'Church Design Since 1950', IN *Ecclesiology Today*, Volume 27 (January 2002), pp 2-14

Scottish Planning Policy SPP23. 2008 *Archaeology and Planning*. Scottish Government Nov 2008.

Scottish Government 2011 *Planning and Archaeology 2/2011*.

### 8.2 Bibliographical references

1852	Ordnance Survey	<i>Edinburghshire, Sheet 2</i>
1896	Ordnance Survey	<i>Edinburghshire Sheet III.NW</i>
1950	Ordnance Survey	<i>Plan NT 2175 NE</i>



## APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

## Black &amp; White Print &amp; Colour Digital Film #1

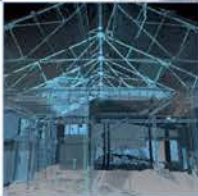
Frame	Area/Elevation	Description	Taken from	Date
1 – 4	-	Unassigned	-	-
5	Living Areas, W Elevation	General view	NW	29/06/2016
6	Church, N Elevation	General view	N	29/06/2016
7 – 8	Church, N Elevation	General view	NNE	29/06/2016
9	Church	General view	NE	29/06/2016
10	Church	General view	NE	29/06/2016
11	Church	General view	NE	29/06/2016
12	Church, S Elevation	General view	S	29/06/2016
13 – 15	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view	SSW	29/06/2016
16 – 17	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view	SW	29/06/2016
18	Church, S Elevation	Detail of main entrance	S	29/06/2016
19	Church, E Elevation	Detail of narthex	E	29/06/2016
20	Church, E Elevation	General view of porch and narthex area	SEE	29/06/2016
21	Church, E Elevation	General view	SE	29/06/2016
22	Church, E Elevation	General view	NE	29/06/2016
23	Church, N Elevation	Detail of burned-out area to roof	N	29/06/2016
24	Church, N Elevation	General view	SW	29/06/2016
25	Hall, N Elevation	General view	NE	29/06/2016
26	Hall	General view	NW	29/06/2016
27	Living Areas, W Elevation	General view	NW	29/06/2016
28	Living Areas, W Elevation	General view	NW	29/06/2016
29	Living Areas, W Elevation	General view	SW	29/06/2016
30	Church, W Elevation	General view	SWW	29/06/2016
31	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view	SW	29/06/2016
32	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view of the link corridor area between the church and living areas	S	29/06/2016
33	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view	SE	29/06/2016
34	Living Areas, S Elevation	General view	SW	29/06/2016
35	Living Areas, S Elevation	Detail of S-most bays	S	29/06/2016
36	-	Registration	-	29/06/2016



## APPENDIX 2: DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND (DES) REPORT

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	City of Edinburgh
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	St Paul's Church, 4 Muirhouse Avenue
PROJECT CODE:	AOC 23504
PARISH:	Edinburgh (City of)
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Diana Sproat
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	AOC Archaeology Group
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Historic Building Recording
NMRS NO(S):	NT27NW 177
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Roman Catholic Church
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR	NT 21949 75995
START DATE	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2016
END DATE	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2016
PREVIOUS WORK	None
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:	<p>AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Robert Mackenzie to undertake an historic building record of the former Roman Catholic St Paul's Church, 4 Muirhouse Avenue, Edinburgh, prior to the demolition of the building to construct new dwellings. The works were required as a condition of planning consent.</p> <p>The church was constructed in 1968 and designed by architect Peter Rice Whitson in an international modernist style in brick with a roughcast render over a steel superstructure. The main church building was to the east with a small vestibule and narthex to either side to the south, a large chapel space to the centre and another activity room to the north side. The church linked into a flat-roofed block containing living quarters to the west of the site. In 2014, a fire gutted the building rendering it unusable, and the roof of the chapel was removed.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	None
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Robert Mackenzie
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	AOC Archaeology Group; Edgefield Road Industrial Estate; Loanhead, Midlothian EH20 9SY
EMAIL ADDRESS:	admin@aocarchaeology.com
ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited in NMRS





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