

# St Nicholas Church, Sighthill

[www.stnicholasedinburgh.org.uk](http://www.stnicholasedinburgh.org.uk)



2019 is a momentous year for St Nicholas Church, Sighthill (The Children's Church). This year marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our church. 80 years ago, in 1939, life at St Nicholas Church did not begin in the grand building you are visiting today but in a small wooden hut behind a drystone dyke, beside the quiet country road that was Calder Road.



*The hut on Calder Road circa 1939*

With bare floorboard, no running water or sewage, no porch, allowing wind, snow and rain to blow in and with no ventilation in summer, the hut was far from ideal. Meant as a temporary building for 2 years, with some improvements, the hut was in use for 18 years due to the intervention of World War 2.

In 1953 a competition for the design of a new church, was held by the National Church Extension Committee. 83 designs were submitted by architects from all over Scotland. The winning design was by Messrs Doak and Whitelaw, architects. They formed the partnership of Ross, Doak and Whitelaw. Work began on the new building in September 1955



*Procession after laying of the Foundation Stone 1955*

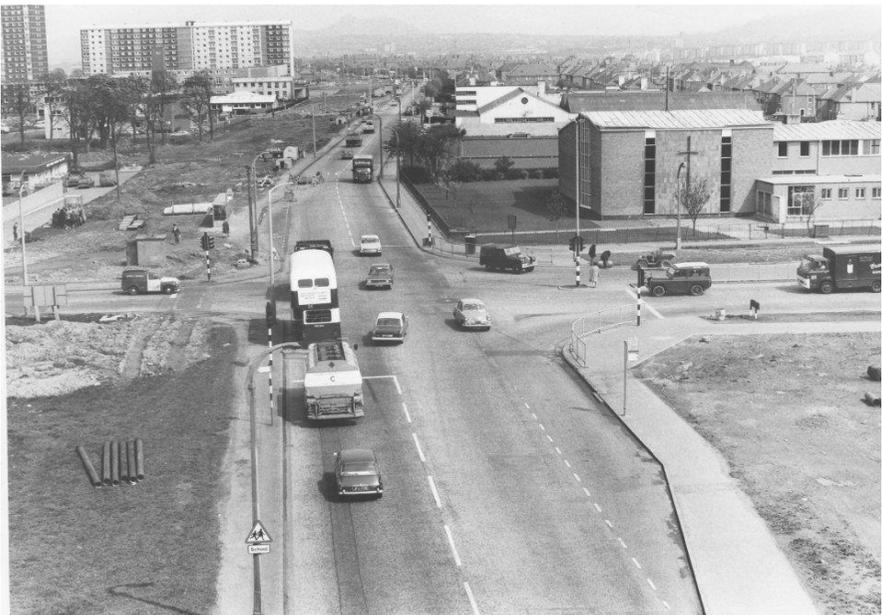
Described as being in 'Festival of Britain/Modernist style' its distinctive form and particularly the copper roof of the church make it a landmark building at a prominent road junction. The exterior and the interior retain many original decorative features and fittings. The building comprises of a rectangular, double height church, integrated Halls and Church Officer Flat, and ancillary buildings. The Sanctuary, Halls and Church Officer's flat are Category B Listed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Back in 1939, when the cost of the church was estimated to be £12,000, the Sunday School children of Scotland were asked to raised 4/5ths of the cost and the church would be called St Nicholas (the patron saint of children). In 1944 another, similar scheme was launched, again appealing to Sunday School children, with the slogan 'a penny per child per quarter'. Any Sunday School taking part would be entered on a permanent record in a Book of Contributors and you can view a copy of the book at the back of the church. Eventually, the children raised the total of £51,000. We owe a tremendous debt to the Sunday School children of Scotland and to the scheme's organisers. The remaining cost of the church (total £52,660) and the manse (£12,777) was met by the congregation who were asked to give sixpence in addition to their regular weekly offerings.



*Completed church with grounds laid out circa 1958*

The urbanisation of the area west of the church took place over the 1960s. The Calder 'Prefabs' were removed and replaced by a large, complex housing scheme including 3 multi-storey blocks, a new shopping centre and a primary school. Wester Hailes and Calder Roads were duelled, dividing the Calders from the church and causing our Calder Road entrance to become redundant. The Murray Burn, which gave its name to the school on Sighthill Loan, built in 1939, was culverted. Sighthill also got a new shopping centre. Work began on the construction of Wester Hailes in 1967.



*Road junction and church in 1975*

### **St Nicholas Notes**

- 1939 the building of houses proceeded one block west side of each street off Sighthill View
- 1939 Murrayburn School was built. Sunday School and uniformed organisations used the school due to pressure of numbers.

- 1946 It was reckoned that 80% of Protestant children in the area attended Sunday School.
- 1949 11 Sunday School parties were held, the Sunday School picnic required 10 double-decker buses, there were 4 companies of Guides, 5 packs of Brownies with 200 on the waiting list, Life Boys, Boys' Club, Girls' Club, Club Association, Band of Hope.
- 1950 The Choir was formed.
- 1953 Sunday School numbers peaked at 1,128 children, 262 in Bible Class, 97 Sunday School teachers.
- 1958 The grounds were laid out requiring 300 tons of soil to make level.
- 1963 Acquisition and installation of the organ, a donation from Dalmeny Street Church
- 1971 The car park was asphalted
- 1980 The heating system was changed from oil to gas
- 2012 The Hymnal (computerised organ) and wiring installed cost £2,492. The peripherals were donated.
- 2014 New kitchen fitted and new heating boilers installed
- 2017 Small hall refurbished, new radiators fitted by fabric group and volunteers
- 2017 Whole church roof replaced
- 2018 Painting of the Sanctuary cost £8,520

### **Ministers of St Nicholas Church**

Rev Alan J Fraser	1939-1942
Rev Robert R Philip	1941-1942
Rev Robert Dick	1942-1970
Rev Andrew Ireland	1971-1975
Rev Kenneth Mackay	1976-2007
Rev Alan Cobain	2008-2013
Rev Dr Tom Kisitu	2015-

## **Current activities held in the church:**

ACU Training, Elite Dancers, Rainbows, Brownies, Karate, AA, Toddler Group, Tuesday Group, SWI Meeting, Coffee Shop, Prayer Group, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Bethany Community Lunch, Demarco Project Dance, Messy Church, Remnant Christian Network, Worship, Sunday School.

## **Extract from Historic Environment Scotland listed website** (<https://canmore.org.uk/site/143714/edinburgh-sighthill-calder-road-st-nicholas-church>)

**ST NICHOLAS PARISH CHURCH (CHURCH OF SCOTLAND) INCLUDING HALLS AND CHURCH OFFICER'S ACCOMMODATION, 124 SIGHTHILL LOAN, 517-519 CALDER ROAD, WESTER HAILES ROAD, EDINBURGH LB52143**

## **Summary**

*Category B; Date Added 17/12/2013; Local Authority Edinburgh; Planning Authority; Edinburgh; Burgh Edinburgh; NGR NT 19465 70637; Coordinates 319465, 670637*

## **Description**

Ross, Doak and Whitelaw, 1955-7. Roughly Z-plan, 'Festival of Britain Style' church, comprised of double height, rectangular-plan church to N with double height, rectangular-plan hall adjoined perpendicular to S and 2-storey, rectangular-plan small hall and church officer's accommodation adjoined to W of halls; single storey entrance hall block to NW re-entrant angle; on a corner site adjacent to a post-war housing estate. Church with exposed aggregate concrete base course and cavity brick walls with brown and grey facing bricks in stretcher bond; slate window surrounds. Church halls

and church officer's accommodation predominantly brick at ground floor with cement render above; terrazzo cills. 'Festival of Britain' Style interior decorative scheme including distinctive tiling to entrance vestibule.

W (WESTER HAILES ROAD) ELEVATION: church to left; canted with full-height Broughton Moor slate cladding panels section to centre flanked by single glazed strip. 7-bay church hall to right of church; advanced ground floor with glazed panel to outer left incorporating stained glass light and N return with pair of entrances in concrete surround; concrete panel with figurative relief carving to right of entrances (see NOTES). 2-storey, advanced gable to far right (small hall and church officer's accommodation); N return with deeply recessed vestibule with distinctive-patterned, square, coloured and glazed tiles; entrance doors to returns.

N (CALDER ROAD) ELEVATION: church with full-height, wide, canted glazed section to centre, composed of narrow opaque lights. Chancel stepped back to far left with full height glazing separated by timber fins.

E ELEVATION: chancel wall with brick in enlarged basket weave bond and advanced brick detail. Open sections to top left at belfry. Slightly advanced single storey, flat roofed block to left (garage and session room).

S (SIGHTHILL LOAN) ELEVATION: 2 storey, 3 bays to far left (small hall and church officer's accommodation) with linear glazing at ground floor and recessed vestibule to right with doors to return. Double-height brick gable to left (church hall); 4-bay return to E with multipane glazed clerestory and bays separated by square concrete columns. Church, set back and to right of church hall, with geometric glazed saw-toothed clerestory and reinforced concrete belfry to right;

advanced single storey section at ground with 2-leaf timber entrance doors with sidelight and fanlights set within recess to right

INTERIOR: (seen 2013). 'Festival of Britain Style' decorative scheme throughout characterised by original timber fixtures and fittings, hardwood and softwood flooring to church, halls and session room and terrazzo tiles to circulation areas. Church with timber pews, square pulpit and chancel wall with coloured relief panelling representing the tearing of the temple veil; unusual choir and organ gallery to W supported on a pair of chamfered concrete supports and independent of the W wall to appear as free-standing, raked seating and slatted timber balustrade to gallery; roof supported by painted concrete bison beams and square pilasters. Large hall with vertically boarded timber to dado and S gable wall. Inner vestibule doors (from S elevation) timber with coloured glazed insets. Original door furniture.

Bespoke metal frames to church and large church hall; casement windows to other sections. Pitch roof, copper sheet; tall and slender ventilator, ridge finial to church.

### **Statement of Special Interest**

Place of worship in use as such. St Nicholas Church is a good and rare example of a Festival of Britain Style church building, characterised by its varied used of materials and unusual detailing. This detailing includes abstract glazing, brick work detail to the chancel, slate cladding emphasising the canted sections and distinctive tiling to an entrance vestibule. Building materials were restricted following the Second World War until 1953 and the design of the church embraces the lifting of these restrictions. Internally the church retains many of its original fixtures and fixtures. The open-plan design demonstrates the move to a less hierarchical form of worship occurring during this period following the principles of the

contemporary Liturgical Movement, exemplified in Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral.

The church is prominently located on a corner site on the northern edge of a post war housing estate and adjacent to a principal thoroughfare for those entering the city of Edinburgh.

The building was designed by Archibald Mackintosh Doak and Alexander Robertson Whitelaw in a competition judged by the eminent architect Robert Matthew, Church of Scotland Architect Harry Taylor and Reverend Professor JG Riddell. Doak and Whitelaw were working for Keppie and Henderson at the time, but after winning the competition they established the new practice of Ross, Doak and Whitelaw, with David John Alexander Ross. Their other churches include St Mary's, Drumry, Glasgow (1954-7) and Garthamlock and Craighend Church, Glasgow (1955-7), which is now demolished.



Held in 1951 the Festival of Britain was a nationwide programme of events to celebrate Britain's contribution to science, technology, industrial design, architecture and the arts and put forward an optimistic and progressive view of Britain's future, especially in the aftermath of WWII. The centrepiece of the festival was the exhibition around the south bank of the Thames, London, and the only permanent building erected was the Royal Festival Hall by Leslie Martin, Peter Moro and Robert Matthew of the London County Council Architects' Department. Modernist architecture was at the forefront of the Festival and was influential in the design of the buildings which followed it. The Festival Style for church architecture



is rare but is evident at Christ Church, Coventry (1954-58) by Alfred Gardner.

The brief for the new building was for a church designed to

hold 450, a church hall for 300 and of a height sufficient to play badminton, as well as ancillary rooms including a small hall, 3-bedroom quarters for the church officer and a session house. The building is also known as the Children's Church, because every Sunday school child in Scotland was challenged to give a penny per quarter to raise money for its construction. This appeal raised £51,000 and the building was officially opened on 9th September 1957. Adjacent to the principal entrance is a commemorative

concrete panel with figurative reliefs of St Nicholas, the patron saint of children, and the gifts of money from children.



## **St Nicholas Global Connections**

Our minister, Rev Dr Tom Kisitu, was born and raised in Uganda.

The Church is used by two African churches: the Deeper Christian Life Ministry and the Remnant Christian Network. Deeper Christian life church is a predominantly African-led and African founded church. It's leader/founder hails from Ghana and Julius Joseph, the local pastor, is also Ghanaian. DCLM holds two meetings here at St Nicholas: a Sunday service held between 2 and 5 pm and a Bible study/prayer meeting on Wednesday evenings. They describe themselves as, 'a family of Christians that take Christ-like living and holiness seriously'. They seek to reach out to all people in the UK and are keen and are happy to join us, as they have done on several occasions in the past, in our community/special events and services. Pastor Julius is happy to give you more information about their church. His email address is [gbengaemmy@gmail.com](mailto:gbengaemmy@gmail.com).

Remnant Christian Network is not a church group. They are a network of Christians who meet in our buildings, on the 3rd Friday of every month, for Bible learning, prayer and worship, mutual support and encouragement. They are also keen to partner with us in our prayer and mission work in the community. Dennis, his wife Ruth and several pastors in Edinburgh head up this ministry and work very well and closely together. Dennis and Ruth are also happy to give you more information about the life and work of the network. Ruth's email address is [ruthspecial@yahoo.com](mailto:ruthspecial@yahoo.com).

Our first valued contact with people from overseas was with Miss Boughen from Australia in 1950 who came to Scotland to get insight into Church Extension.

In the 1970s Rev Dr King was assistant to our Minister, Mr Dick. Rev King, an eye specialist, who together with his wife, travelled to India to pass his knowledge to Indian doctors.

Margaret Reid, Deaconess here at St Nicholas, was sponsored by the Woman's Guild in Scotland to teach girls in Malawi during the 1980s.

St Nicholas Children's Relief is a charity set up by our own Maureen Samuel. During the 1980s aid was taken to Romania at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1990 two buses and twenty trucks took medical aid to orphanages. The congregation and children assisted Edinburgh Direct Aid taking aid and repatriation to Bosnia at the end of the civil war. We helped with a Scotland-wide effort to fill shoe boxes with much needed luxuries for our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For twenty years from the 1980s Maureen Samuel played a crucial part in organising the Dreamflight helped with funds raised by the congregation. The Dreamflight took a British Airways jumbo jet filled with ill and disabled children to Disneyworld in Florida for the holiday of a lifetime.

The Baptismal font and tiles behind, depicting Mary and the baby Jesus, was gifted to us by a friend of our Deaconess, living in Canada, for the opening of the church.

The Main Doors of the church were gifted to us by the children of Canada.