

Grange House and Estate

by Graham Johnston



This is a story of a ruin - one which has had little exposure to its history and a profile which hides much of its historical importance. What I am about to tell you is almost entirely based on extensive research that Dr. Stuart Gray and Grizelda Cowan have done in relation to the property of which they were one time owners – but more of that later.

Firstly therefore let's try to identify what we are talking about since although most of us will be familiar with the outline of the two chimneys on the horizon as we look up towards Grange Hill we may not be aware of exactly where this is.

Below is a map of the area



This is the 1853 Ordnance Survey map and I think we can take it that the map is correctly surveyed and the items there properly placed. Note “ruins” even in 1853. You will see Grangehill and Grange both farms, but between each is a building marked, even in 1853, as “Ruins”. Note also the coal pits; they will feature later.

Before I get into detail about grange house however, there is a matter which I have to my enlightenment discovered, but probably not others.

I had always thought that the coal fields of Earlsferry were on the golf course and the various mounds, etc., that we see are man-made as a result of the mining. However, recently I did a comparison by superimposing that 1853 OS map which showed the coal pits and engine house over the current

Google Earth view of the same area. With a bit of adjustment I have managed to get both maps to the same scale so that if I superimpose the OS map on the Google Earth map you will see something rather different.



This is the image which I adjusted to make the same scale using the elbow of ferry road and the buildings to get a pretty good match.





This shows that my earlier view is erroneous.

I do not know if I am right in this, but it very much looks like the actual coalpits as designated in the 1853 survey, with one exception, were not on the golfing area at all, but where the current houses on Grange Road are. Note also the Engine house with a small pit alongside. It I am pretty certain that corresponds with the area where the sink hole appeared last year (2024).

Also if you get down on your hands and knees and look along the ridge about 150yds up the 17th fairway, you will see that it lines up with the pipe in the middle of the rough – I suggest therefore that there was a diagonal mine crossing the fairway and the pipe is a ventilation system. This seems more likely because they would have used the engine not only to pull the buckets full of coal but also perhaps to pump air into the shaft.

Anyway back to Grange House.

The two farms are actually substantially bigger than Grange House. This is what it looks like now from the golf course:



We know that the current ruin was built probably in the first decade of the 18th Century. Some say 1708, although I will question that later. But before that there may well have been some sort of edifice on its footprint because the Grange Farm lying to the east belonged to the Cistercian Order of nuns who ran the hospices at Chapel Green and North Berwick servicing pilgrims and others who used the ferry between east Lothian and Earlsferry.

The nuns acquired Grange House from one of the early settlers in this region, the Merleswaines, at the end of the 12th Century or so. This was a fairly frequent method of landed families currying favour with the church by donating land and/or property to it; no doubt in the hope that by such a donation their time in purgatory on death would be reduced, which as you know was one of Martin Luther's gripes against the church – the sale of indulgences posted on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral.

What is known is that in or about 1550 the English raided the nuns' properties in North Berwick and did some damage. To pay for expensive repairs the nuns sold Grange Farm and House to Alexander Wood, the vicar of Largo (Admiral Andrew Wood's brother), for £1000.

[I noticed that this was close to the date of the battle of St. Monance so I thought it might have been the same English army that came to grief there in 1548.]

Isn't it interesting that the churchmen always seemed to have plenty of money in those days. At that time one of the foremost Scottish Admirals was based at Largo, Admiral Andrew Wood, whose lineage we can trace right forward to the present day ownership of Wynd House in Rankeillor Street Elie, but that is perhaps for another story.

Of course by this point (1550s) the flow of pilgrims across the estuary to visit the bones of St Andrew was much reduced as a result of the reformatory zeal of John Knox *et al* and not least because the bones themselves had disappeared.

It is more than likely that Alexander Wood had little or any interest in the property whatever it consisted of and was merely looking for an investment. In any event, it was most unlikely to be a substantial dwelling house at that point although included a small farm. This is the approximate timeline of ownership of the Grange:

- 12th Century - Merleswaine gifts farm and land to nuns of Cistercian Order.
- 1550 - Nuns sell to Rev Alexander Wood for £1000.
- Alexander Wood passes to his nephew John Wood.
- John passes to his brother James.
- 1556 - Alexander Wood James' son inherits.
- 1621 - James Wood succeeds to father.
- 1653 - James sells to Watson of St Andrews (probably to redeem a loan).
- 1654 - Watson sells to Captain Arnot (related to the Newarks at St Monance).
- 1691 - Arnot sells to James Malcolm of Balbedie and Inverteil.
- 1720 ish - James prosecuted and the Grange forfeited to the Crown.
- 1725 - Margaret Malcolm buys Grange back from the Crown and passes on to another branch of the family her nephew Robert.
- 1725 - Robert Malcolm steps in.
- 1729 - John, James' father, and James himself die within months of each other.
- 1769 - Robert dies and passes to his son James.
- 1790s - property in ruins, probably fire damage.
- 1805 - James dies and passes to his son John.

- 1828 - John dies and passes to son Michael.
- 1868 - serious damage by fire again (not rebuilt).

So having received a confirmation of his ownership he sold it to his nephew John Wood, Andrew Wood's son, who then passed on the estate to his brother James. His eldest son, Alexander, became owner on the death of his father in 1596. It then passed to his son James in 1621. After some brushes with Cromwell's men in 1653 or so, it was sold to James Watson of St Andrews, but this was probably as a result of his not redeeming a loan. Watson sold it the following year to Capt. George Arnot, who married into the Leslie family of Newark.

In any event, in 1691 (we think) he sold it to James Malcolm of Balbedie (his elder brother John was apparently a baron of Nova Scotia).

[I couldn't quite understand how Nova Scotia in Canada could have bestowed baronetcies on people. I discovered in early 17th Century there was fierce competition between the European nations to establish colonies on the eastern seaboard of USA and Canada and so these hereditary titles were initiated by King James VI & I in 1622. Although he died in early 1625, he left the administration of the Order to his son and heir King Charles I, who created the first Baronets of Nova Scotia on 25 May 1625.]

Each Baronet was required to pay Sir William Alexander of Menstrie, I think he was the Earl of Stirling who started the colonising project, the sum of 1,000 merks for his past expenses and 2,000 merks for future costs, as a way of funding his attempt to create the colony in Nova Scotia. In return he became a hereditary baron, entitled to call themselves 'Sir'. Intriguing - I thought it was early cash-for-honours! Some things seldom change.

Each Baronet was granted 16,000 acres in Nova Scotia – an area of North America including the modern Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsula. Although taking up the land was not compulsory. In addition to the hereditary title of Baronet that entitled the Baronet to be called 'Sir', with Baronet or Bt added after their name.

The Malcolm family saw this opportunity to buy into the aristocracy so joined it on 25th July 1665 with the barony Balbedie and Inverteil. They are actually at Ballingry in Fife and it seems to have been part of the Fife *modus operandi* at that time because quite a number of these baronies of Nova Scotia were

picked up by the wealthy Fifers. Anstruther had both sides of the family buying into the scheme.

It was said that James acquired the Grange in 1708, although other sources have the Malcolms acquiring it in 1691.

We know that the nuns operated the Grange Farm as a means of providing sustenance to the pilgrims and it therefore is unlikely that a large house was built on this plot until 1708, which is the date attributed to the building by Historic Scotland.

Subsequent investigation on behalf of the Grays established that there were three previous buildings, the remains of which are still incorporated into what is there today. I think that it is likely that the Malcolms acquired it in 1691 and started work on refurbishing it. It is from then on that the House starts to feature in Scottish history.

So the first decade of the 18th Century saw much disruption in Scotland and England, not least because the succession of the protestant Queen Anne (pictured right) to the English throne. The Act of Succession in 1701 prohibited catholics from becoming monarch and the Act of Union in 1707, which effectively bound Scotland and England together politically as well as monarchically. When Queen Anne died in 1714 there was a move afoot to bring back the catholic Stuart line rather than go down the presbyterian Hanover line of George I.



There was ground-swell of opinion, especially in Scotland, that the old pretender, James Edward Stewart son of James II then in exile in France, was the rightful incumbent of the Scottish and English thrones so many Jacobites plotted to see what they could do to restore the Stuart dynasty.

James Malcolm was an ardent Jacobite and he apparently solicited the arrival of the Old Pretender or rather his advance guard in 1708 when a ship load or two of French mercenaries were chaperoned by Malcolm up the Firth of Forth with a view to landing in Pittenweem or Anstruther. It was the intention to raise support in Scotland, for the Old Pretender to land and set up his standard.

The visitors had awaited signals from shore that they were to be welcomed to land and having received no such signals took fright when they saw the English fleet bearing down on them in the morning, so they scarpered back to France. It is said that they did not want to engage the English Fleet because in order to increase the number of soldiers being carried they dispensed with much of the ships' artillery.



James Edward Stewart

The impression is that the current house was built round about this time because it is in a very favourable geographical position with outlook to both north and south – south across the Forth and north across the hills towards the centre of Fife.

Wood, in his history of the East Neuk, takes the view that this was when the house was built. We think initially there may have been a house there in 1690s but we are fairly certain that substantial alterations were done to the house in 1711 and there is a suggestion that it was a very early work of William Adam, the doyen of Scottish architects, because it bears likeness to some of his later work but this has not been authenticated. However, its style was very much that of the period.



William Adam

We suspect that when Malcolm acquired the house and site he also built - or at least refurbished - the farm next door as Grange Farm, which would enable the farming carried on by the nuns at Grange to be continued. Of course, he could also let out the farm and farm buildings and, after refurbishing the house, he could live in it. In any event, the farm buildings there date roughly to that period.

Not having been deterred by the apparent abortive attempt in 1708 to land the French advance party of the Old Pretender the movement, under Malcolm's patronage, was still very active and the Earl of Mar having been recruited. There was a dinner meeting to be held in Grange house in August 1715 to lay the groundwork for a Stuart uprising. The Earl of Mar had been down south and in France at the Old Pretender's Court, but he sailed up from London to Newcastle and then boarded a vessel belong to Capt. Spence of Elie, where they set him ashore.



Earl of Mar

When the conspirators sat down to dinner in Malcolm's house at the Grange, Malcolm himself was absent - apparently having gone to Kilrenny to see Mar and his party where they had decided to spend the night. History does not tell us much about happened at this meeting, but it started the movement which ended in the defeat of Mar and Jacobites at the battle of Preston in November 1715.

As we know, the 1715 Rebellion ended in disaster and the James's estates were forfeited to the Crown - probably as a result of the failed uprising in 1708 - but certainly as a result of his association with the Jacobites in 1715.

In 1720, having had his estate forfeited, he was rescued by his sister Margaret who had married into a wealthy family and she purchased the estate back from the Forfeiture Commissioners and handed it back to the Malcolms - but obviously not to James but a relation of his, his cousin Robert.

In fact the Grange Estate was a relatively small estate extending onto what is now Elie golf course and towards the sea. Grange was not a baronetcy but the incumbent adopted "of the Grange" in addition to the other formal

baronetcies. The smallest area of ground we think and the least significant was of the Grange. It seemed to consist of Grange House, the farm, a small field to the north and the links to the south extending as far as Chapel Green. It was not a very productive land.

The 1715 revolt petered out at that stage and whilst there was a fair amount of bloodletting, many of those who had been part of the revolt managed to survive, including our James who had escaped to France for a short break.

We work on the assumption that he lived in Grange House occasionally, although he spent a lot of his time in Richmond but he died in 1729, the same year as his father. The Grange Estate passed to Robert Malcolm by James' sister Margaret. In 1769 Robert died and his son James inherits the estate.

We think that he did not really live in Grange house because in 1793 it went on fire for the first time; it seems to have been in some ruin and there was a plan to demolish it. Nothing happened as a result of that, but James died in 1805 and is succeeded by his brother John. It was about this time that the litigation between the Grange Estate and Earlsferry Town council started - about which more shortly.

Again, Sir John did not live in the house as it was semi derelict at this point; only the farmer at Grange would have been interested in the land.

The litigation stated off in the name of Sir John. Briefly, he claimed that Earlsferry lads were playing golf on a strip of ground which belonged to his estate to the prejudice of his farmer Carstairs, whom he had directed to plough up some of this golf course in 1813. This strip of ground ran alongside the current Links Road and round Lundar Law up to West Bay. The bit he ploughed up interrupted the Earlsferry golf course. On the map below, which was drawn up in 1813 for the litigation, you can see that the Earlsferry golfers would start from the side of Ferry Road and play along the side of what is now Links Road and then Seatangle Road, round the corner to Lundar Law, back out towards West Bay and then back along the same line.



The farmer, however, ploughed up the section marked, thereby preventing the Earlsferry golfers from completing the course. Earlsferry Town Council claimed that the ground belonged to the Burgh, so raised a counter action.

Neither side was able to provide any title deeds to the ground but after a lot of evidence, appeals and lawyers bills the matter was settled in 1832 by the court declaring that the Earlsferry People had a right in perpetuity to play golf on part of this ground but the court also said that they had to co-exist with the use of the some of the ground by the farmer.

His son, Sir Michael, inherited and continued the litigation. However, the estate was in some financial trouble Sir John having been an inveterate gambler allegedly losing £30,000 at Whites in a single night, which equates to about £280,000 in today's terms. At that point there was some doubt as to whether the estate would be wound up to pay his creditors and some discussion took place of putting it in entail - this was a way of ensuring the succession to the family to the estate and protect it from creditors. However, Michael was bankrupt when he died in 1828 and it may have been this which resulted in a speedy (relative in those days) resolution of the litigation.

It is at this point that the coal field and the Keddie family became involved with the Grange. Philip Keddie was a Cupar solicitor and actually acted for Sir Michael Malcolm and it was he who saw the potential of the Grange coal fields so he took them on, part time to begin with but later full time, giving up his practice in Cupar.

In 1842 He negotiated a lease of Grange House and the Farm with the Malcolm family, notwithstanding that he did not have the slightest interest in farming. His wife, however, was of farming stock. She knew something but

did not devote much time to it. I suspect that the Malcolms were glad to get rid of the farm, which had become a liability. Although the property was in a poor state, it was reckoned by Keddie that he and his family could live in it with some alterations and repairs. The farm itself was also in a dilapidated state.

It is at this point that we are fortunate enough to have a lot of information about the house and what was happening in Elie and Earlsferry in 1840s.

Keddie had a number of children including Henrietta (pictured right), who eventually became an accomplished Victorian novelist under the pseudonym of Sarah Tytler. She obligingly wrote a book about her family, which gives some insight into what it was like in Grange House.



She tells us *“There was no farmhouse on the farm, only an old mansion house which had been condemned to be pulled down in 1793, fifty years before. However, it was found perfectly susceptible on repair and its space, with a little furnishing, was an ample provision for sea bathing lodgings. In addition, a trustworthy servant was put into it to act as caretaker at other times so that my father could stay there instead of repairing to the village inn during his weekly visits of inspection [of the coal fields]”*

By an odd coincidence, the coal seam, farm and mansion house were part of the property of the young son of the ex-soldier and uncouth Baronet, Sir Michael Malcolm, for whom my father and his senior partner in his firm were agents. Sir Michael began life in the humblest circumstances with the exception of this fact that he happened to be the cousin and next heir of a man in a much higher rank of life. The poor relation enlisted and served as a private soldier in the army fighting in the wars abroad. Certainly his intelligence and knowledge were not superior to those qualities in his comrades of whom he was a disreputable specimen. He was lying under a sentence which, if it had been carried out, would have meant so many lashes from the Cat o’ Nine Tails, when the tidings arrived that he had inherited an old Baronetcy with land enough to have two quaint manor houses. Sir Michael was at once the unreliable master and the abject slave of his agents to whom he turned in blind bewilderment for direction in his new sphere.

Never were leaders more tried in their efforts to marshal him into something like decent behaviour befitting the station at which he had arrived. He had frequent half-crazy malicious impulses to contradict his guides and come out in his true colours.

She continued.....

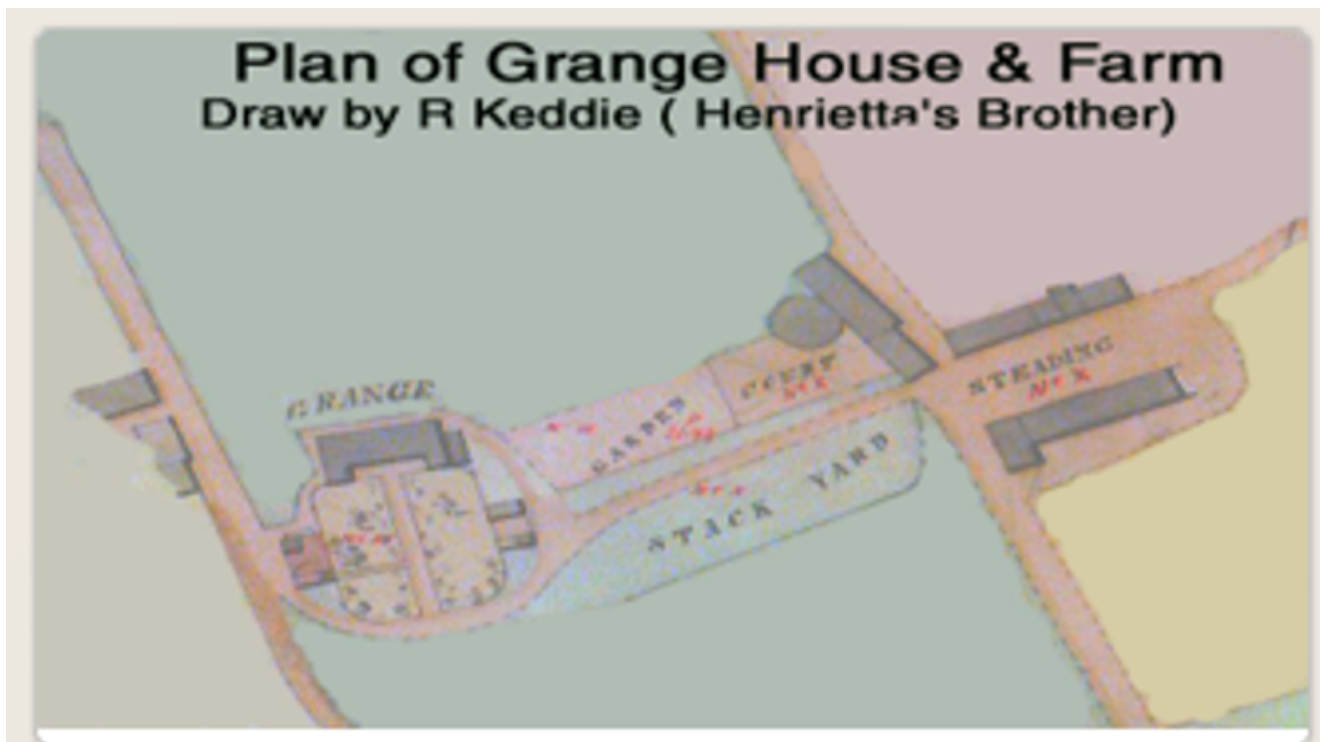
“It was true in connection with this sorry laird that his wife, who had been his servant, stole from his desk at the risk of her life in one of his drunken bouts, the Will, which my father and his partner had got the husband to sign as a protection for her and her family. To save the Will she hid it in the garden wall where it remained safely until Sir Michael had recovered from his besotted mania.”

She continues....

“It was not until Grange Colliery gave a fair promise of being remunerative [1843] that my father made up his mind to give up his partnership in the legal firm, leave Cupar altogether, and come with his family to make a permanent home at the old house in the neighbourhood of the pit.

The weather-beaten white house with its pillared entrance and its flower garden stood on the top of a little brae which has been gradually ploughed down and practically effaced from the landscape. But when it was a permanent feature it rose in the teeth of the local scourge, the east wind, which at time would rage for weeks so fiercely as to throw down the stacks in the stackyard and scatter the goodly sheaves right and left. Not a tree less hardy than an elder bush could stand its severity without being hopelessly blighted, even by the June gales and that in a most unseemly manner.”

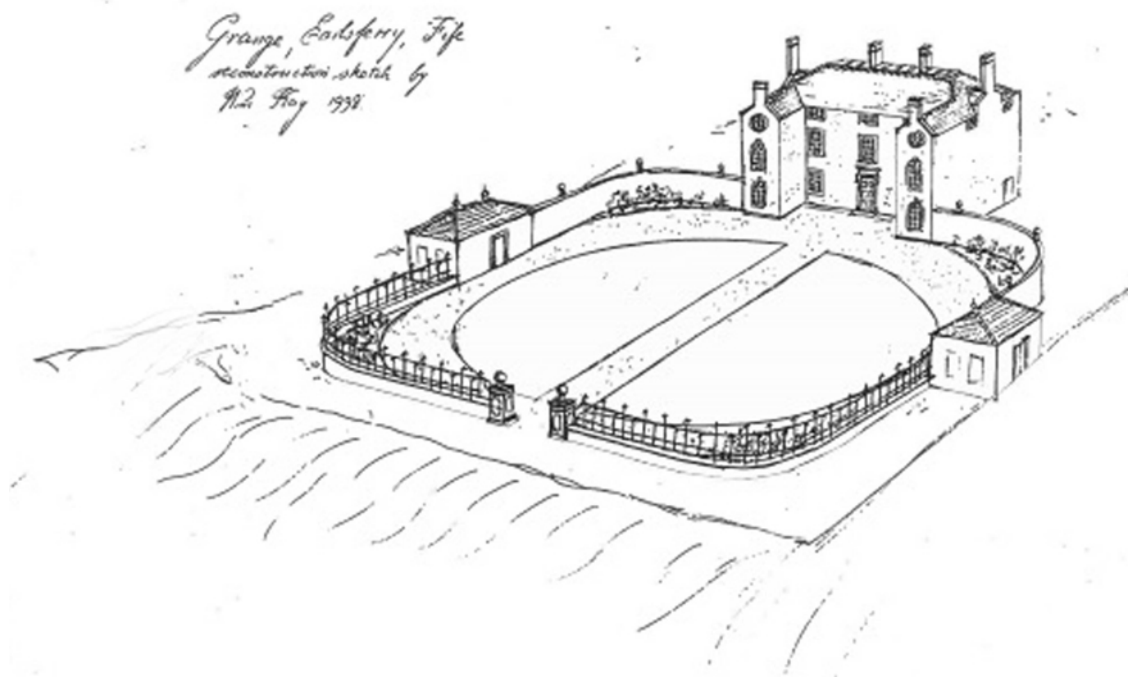
Philip Keddie lived in the house until about 1850 when he became ill, retired and moved to Williamsburgh and later lived at 62 Noth Street in Elie, where he died in 1853. His son Robert took over the coalfield. It was he who produced a useful sketch of the house in 1848 (below).



The plan shows the footprint of the house and the garden where Grizelda Cowan built her house in 2000 and lives now. There were two “pavilions” – one on either side, the east one being what is now Grizelda’s stable. The circular building at the grange farm is a horse driven mill (picture below). This is now owned by Angus Meldrum. The sketch below is very illustrative of the type of use.



The Gray family also recovered a sketch of the house done by George Kay in 1990s (below).



By 1867 however, the farm was tenanted by a Mr. Fraser who tried to refurbish what was left of the house but alas his efforts were in vain; another fire broke out in 1868 and the house has been a ruin ever since. It remained unoccupied so that in the OS in 1853 it was described as a ruin once again. I also think that the farm buildings themselves probably neglected by the Keddies were in much of a ruin.

This was the newspaper report:

*Grange House Destroyed by Fire. —A fire broke out in Grange House late on Friday night, which resulted the large building being burned to the ground. The house was the residence of Mr Fraser (farmer) and family, and the property of Sir James Malcolm, Bart. The house stood for many years uninhabited, till Mr Fraser came to it about a twelve months ago, when it underwent large amount of repairs, and was handsomely furnished. It is not positively known how the fire originated, but it is supposed that some sparks from the fire in a room on the third floor hall got down between the hearthstone and the wall—the alarm being given by the hearthstone falling. At the time, all the inmates were in bed, except Miss Fraser. Mr Fraser was at Elie, waiting, with many others, the arrival of the result the election, which did not arrive till halfpast twelve.**

*This was the first general election to be held after the passage of the Reform Act of 1867 which enfranchised many male householders, thus greatly increasing the number of men who could vote in the elections in the United Kingdom. It was the first election held in which more than a million votes were cast - nearly triple the number before Gladstone beat Disraeli. Robert Anstruther was elected as MP for this constituency, so there was quite an interest in its result. Gladstone beat Disraeli.

On proceeding home he was met his son, who told him what had happened. He was too late to be of any service. The alarm was first given in the town by a Sergeant of the Police Force, who immediately had the town bell rung, and many turned out and proceeded to the scene of the conflagration. Miss Fraser's gallant conduct in saving the younger members of the family and some valuable items, the risk of her life, is worthy of the highest praise. ploughmen on the farm also behaved in praiseworthy manner. Destruction of the furniture and clothes was complete. The children, who were in bed, barely escaped with their lives. Fortunately the wind was not the south-east, for in that case nothing could have saved the farmyard and all the stabling. The fire was seen for miles round. Much sympathy is felt for Mr Fraser, who is much respected in the district. The furniture not being insured, Mr Fraser's loss will be heavy. The house itself was insured.

In 1885 there was a rumour that there was a plan to refurbish or rebuild the house, but it came to nothing.

So the Grange House itself, since 1868, has been ruined - but the farm continued even though there was actually not much land. Locals may recall that James Black used to have a dairy herd at Grange Hill Farm in the 1950s and 60s supplying milk to the village, along with Tom Hudson, and he used the fields normally attached to Grange Farm to pasture his cattle. The valuation role of 1855 shows Malcolm as proprietor of Grange Farm and the tenant Ferguson who also owned Grange Hill Farm. There is a suggestion that the property was sold in about 1901, but we're fairly certain this is not the case because Dr Bob Gray and his family bought it in 1967 from Edith Maud Sackville Lyde-Malcolm or Robertson, who is a direct descendant of the Malcolm's.

When Bob Gray and his wife died, John, Stuart and Grizelda fell heir to the Grange House. Their father had also bought various other parts of the Grange Farms and converted them into dwellinghouses but they were left with the derelict Grange House. Stuart especially spent a huge amount of

time and energy in not only sourcing all the information which I have given you above, but also seeing if there was a way to refurbish the house.

Now the fact that it may have been an early William Adam design might well have stimulated those with that historical knowledge, but unfortunately no authentication can be found of its provenance. A thorough investigation was done by those who know about these things and the actual brochure which was produced for Stuart and Grizelda confirmed the robustness of the construction and confirmed that there were probably three phases of the building.

Obviously the nuns to start with, but the second I suggest was 1691 when the Malcolms first acquired it, and in 1711 when substantial alterations were done and the outline of the house as it is now was established.

Stuart had an idea of trying to market the property as is, but most seemed to have cold feet. In the meantime, J Campbell Whyte a Glasgow businessman had purchased the west pavilion, known as Grange Cottage, and part of the back garden of that property encroaches onto the front garden area of the house. So Mr. Whyte bought the whole property with the clear objective that none was going develop it and build houses on the area and he wanted to preserve it.

So there it is - a dark outline of three chimneys on the horizon of Grange Hill with a huge amount of history to add to what we already know about the village. It is an amazingly robust building, having survived over 150 years as just a shell. I shall leave it with you as it is.

