

# **Seacroft Grange**

*My story by Eric Hives*

Isn't it good to see Seacroft Grange finally being restored? This beautiful building was my school from 1955 to 1962. I no longer live in the area now, but I return to Seacroft on a regular basis. I have many photographs of the Grange that I took in 1982, right up to the present day and I have made a scale drawing of the ground floor and also have a roof plan.

A while back, I came over from my home near Wetherby, with my ladders and gave the coat of arms over the east door, several coats of stone preserver as it was beginning to deteriorate badly. I would proudly tell anyone that I met on my visits, that this fine old building had once been my school. It seems to have become a bit of an obsession!

Seacroft Grange had been boarded up and empty for at least 18 years and was in a very sorry state. This saddened me as it did many other people and when Springfield Healthcare announced that they wanted to 'save' the Grange and develop the site, everyone was delighted. However, there were so many false starts and by 2011 the building was deteriorating rapidly.

Then one day, when the boarded up doors had been forced open yet again, I decided that I would go into the building myself and have a look around. I hadn't been inside for almost 50 years!

So in September 2011, I left my wife outside in the car and told her that if I didn't return within an hour, to immediately contact the police! I acknowledge that it was risky and probably quite a foolish thing to do - but there you go!

With my oldest clothes on and a good torch, I very nervously edged my way inside. After a few yards, apart from my torch, I was in total darkness as all the windows were boarded up. However, I was extremely shocked to see what an absolute mess the interior was in. There was plenty of evidence of other people getting inside, including discarded needles and other drug related items, empty alcohol cans and bottles, discarded clothing and human waste!

Most of the upper floor had gone so the roof was visible. Some of the huge oak beams had collapsed and there was a lot of charred timber where fires had been started. Large areas of the ground floor had given way and there was rubble everywhere.

The feral pigeons began flying around as I disturbed them and their droppings were piled high on the ground below where they roosted. In addition, lots of dead pigeons in various states of decay, littered the floor.

Fireplaces had been stripped out and stolen, the walls were covered in peeling paintwork, showing colour after colour from the many years of painting. All in all it was a sad and disgusting sight! My only fear though, was that I would bump into

some 'undesirable' and I decided that if I did, I would not speak, but quickly leave. Luckily, the only company I had on this occasion were the pigeons!

I explored all the ground floor rooms, around 11 in total. I also went down the stone steps into the cellar. I was very nervous and said to myself, "Eric, are you mad?" I didn't get an answer!

In total I spent around 50 minutes inside and I felt quite relieved to come out into the daylight. I felt that what I had just seen was surreal. All my childhood memories had been of happy children, noisily playing and running around inside. Now it was eerily silent!

As I lay in bed that night, my mind was racing. I felt annoyed and disgusted that Seacroft Grange had been allowed to get in to such a sorry state. This beautiful 17<sup>th</sup> century Grade II listed building was a wreck and no one in authority seemed to care!

From what I had seen I was convinced that the Grange was beyond saving; that it would either fall down or have to be demolished as this is what had happened to Seacroft Hall, which was lost forever in 1953/4, without any proper historical records being made.

I decided then that I would go back into Seacroft Grange and make a proper photographic record of the building. But rather than go alone and for a bit of security, I decided to 'enlist' a friend to accompany me. The very next day I rang the 'lucky person' I had nominated and after I explained my plan to him, he told me I was "crazy" and quickly declined!

Undaunted, I decided that my friend Simon would be 'up for it' as I had known him for many years and he liked a bit of 'adventure'! Just a few days later we went together into the Grange and this time I was much more relaxed. I took lots of photographs and we explored every 'nook and cranny'! We eventually came out and I thanked Simon for his support. He had enjoyed the 'adventure' but wasn't really interested in going in again. I was though!

Once I get my teeth into something, there are no half measures and I had to decide on my next 'lucky' accomplice. I quickly thought of my oldest friend, Graham. We have known each other since we were four years old when we both started school at the Grange together in 1955. I rang him in early October 2011 and within an hour we were inside!

It was strange to be together again inside the Grange, but this time as 60 year old men! First of all we went into the room with the castellated bay window which looks south onto the village green. This had been the nursery - our first classroom. We recounted the play house and rocking horse that were in here. Through the opened doorway we could see the house that our old friend, John Robert Gannon, lived in on York Road. Sadly, I had recently learned that he died in 1998.

Above our heads, and because of the missing floor, we could see the room that had been the dreaded school dentist! We went into the next room which was where we practiced music – cymbals, tambourine, triangle and recorders. What a row we must

have made but we were very enthusiastic. I remember the teacher in here asking me “what do you want to do when you grow up Eric?” maybe thinking that playing music had inspired me. I told her I wanted to be a clown!

On into the next room, where my only memory of being in here was of myself and another lad called Paul Blackburn, being made to sit on our own whilst morning assembly took place because we had been disruptive!

We then went into the hallway where the grand old staircase used to be. Then into the head’s study (Miss Dowgill and later Mr Parsons) where small groups of us as children were interviewed by two detectives, regarding yet another school burglary!

We then went into the next room which had been the staff room and where I would sometimes be taken to be attended to, after one of the frequent nose-bleeds that I used to get during boisterous playtimes.

During this visit I took lots more photographs and we eventually left. What memories though? It had been just another of the many things that Graham and I had done together. Some I may write down one day, some I had better not!

I had become more confident about going into the Grange and over the next few weeks I went back in on my own several times. Eventually, it was boarded up again so that put a stop to my visits.

However, by this time things were starting to happen regarding the renovation. I had made contact with the Chairman of Springfield Healthcare, Graeme Lee and he gave me permission to photographically record the progress of the renovation and redevelopment of Seacroft Grange. I could now ‘officially’ go into the Grange and I felt honoured and privileged to be allowed to do this.

PDR Construction started work at the beginning of September 2012 and the build is planned to take 58 weeks. By prior arrangement, I now go to the Grange every so often, to take photographs, but strict rules are now in place. I wear a hard hat, reflective jacket and steel toecap boots. Each time I go it is great to see the progress being made and what a thorough job the workmen are doing.

The stone staircase has been removed. The cellar beneath it has been filled in. All the old timbers are being replaced. Some old bricked up windows have been reopened. All the old plaster is being removed to expose the old brick and stone walls, which in turn has exposed large old fireplaces that no one knew existed. Seacroft Grange used to have 17 fireplaces - amazing! On one occasion the workmen showed me some small patterns that a stone mason, centuries earlier, had cut into a stone lintel above a fire place.

On completion, my old school, Seacroft Grange will have been saved and restored! Seacroft will have a fantastic new facility, Seacroft Green Care Village, which will be a focal point of the village green. Well done Springfield Healthcare Group.

*Eric Hives*

P.S.

To end on a different note and something I haven't mentioned until now - is regarding one of my visits when I first went into Seacroft Grange on my own and went down to the cellar.

With the light of my torch, I saw a dusty old cupboard in the corner that looked like it hadn't been opened for years. I couldn't resist opening the door and it creaked as I slowly pulled it open.

To my great shock there was a skeleton, in a crouched position, inside. I started to turn and run from the room but saw something hanging around its neck. It was an old medallion on a chain.

I wiped the dust from the medallion with my thumb and saw an inscription. It read 'SEACROFT GRANGE HIDE AND SEEK CHAMPION 1850'!!!!!!

*Eric Hives*