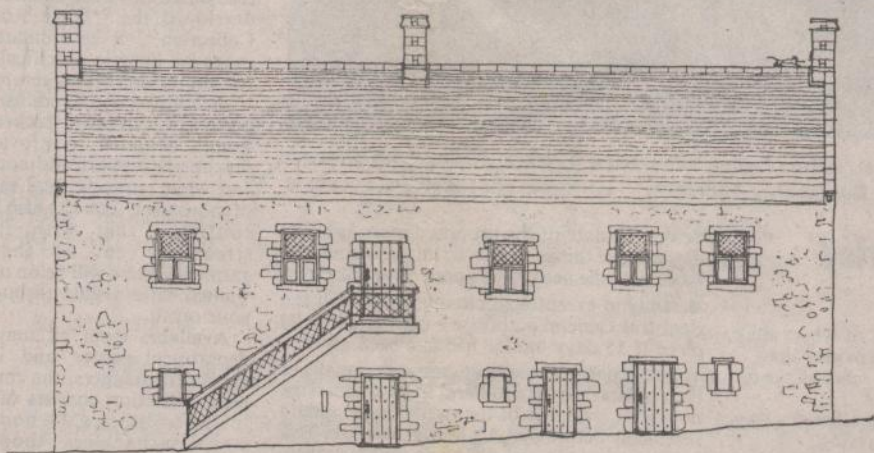


Baron Skelbov — a Russian Laird in the Ancient Manor?



WEST ELEVATION

Architect and historian Ben Tindall's impression of how Skelbo Manor might look when restored.

A Russian businessman is showing interest in restoring the ruins of the mediaeval manor house on Loch Fleet, East Sutherland — and acquiring the title of Baron of Skelbo.

The property presently belongs to the Mrs S J Alexander Will Trust, headed by adventure and travel writer Michael Alexander, formerly of Skelbo House. The dangerous ruins, which stand nearby, were described as "one of the most important castle sites in Scotland" by historian Jane Durham in a BBC radio programme last week.

But war-time Colditz Castle prisoner Mr Alexander, who also organises the annual powered inflatable boat race round Scotland, claims that a main reason for selling off his Scottish home three years ago to a US doctor was the crippling costs of making the ruined manor house safe, as demanded by the planning authority.

The crumbling walls were wired up and "Dangerous Building" notices erected to warn off visitors from a site which was an original Viking stronghold and ended up as a Jacobite refuge just before Culloden 250 years ago.

Much interest has been shown in the ruined 15th Century manor house over the years, notably by antiquarian and author Nigel Tranter, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, the Clan Sutherland Society and Dornoch Heritage Society. The Dornoch group launched an international petition in 1987 calling for

anything about it," said Mr Alexander.

"I am aware that there could be a 75% grant available against putting it in some sort of shape, which is about £140,000 worth of nothing. But to rebuild it into a residence we estimated would cost about £5/600,000 some years back."

Mrs Jane Durham of Scotsburn House, Easter Ross, a member of the Historic



How the manor house has deteriorated over the years. Buildings Trust, was described as "an enthusiastic amateur antiquarian" by George Hume in his BBC Scotland Radio