

The History of Bratton House

Introduction

The first owner and builder of Bratton House was Philip Ballard who started the enterprise in 1716 (see Picture 1). However, the Ballard family is mentioned as far back as 1542 in Bratton church records. They were recorded as farmers; but, at least one was also mentioned as an archer.

The first definite address at which the Ballards were recorded as living was in a farm, which came to be known as Ballard's Home Living, and which is now called Grange Farm (see Picture 2). It is at the western end of Lower Road. The original farmhouse, in the Ballards' time, was small and half-timbered. Part of this building can be seen in the north wall of the present Grange Farm.



1. Bratton House, showing the 1716 facade



2. Grange Farm, as it is now

Originally, the Home Living was part of the estate of William Bromwich, the son of Sefton Bromwich whose brass plate is in Bratton



3. Winters, as it is now

Church. In 1669, the estate was bought by Sir James Thynne of Longleat and, in a survey of 1682, the land is recorded as being leased to Henry Ballard by Sir Thomas Thynne, 1st Viscount Weymouth.

Henry had four sons, but only one, William, outlived him. William married an Elizabeth. We are uncertain as to her surname, but her father may have been Philip King. The Kings were a prominent Bratton farming family. She bore him at least two children, Mary in c1674 and Philip in 1676, before dying in 1685.

In 1693, Philip Ballard, still a minor, seems to have been a joint beneficiary with his sister, Mary, of Philip King's estate. The assets were valued at £500 (or about £1.6 million today when considering the possible impact of such an amount of money).

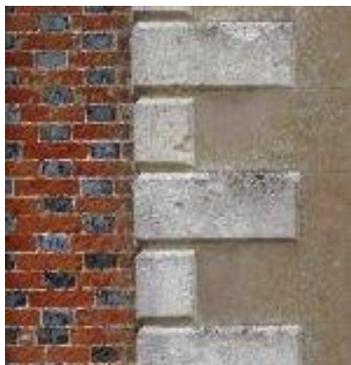
William married for a second time in 1689, Mary Aldridge of Devizes. During his life, William seems to have been quite successful and retired to a house on Lower Road called "Winters" (see Picture 3). While he was still alive, he left his worldly possessions to Philip, his only surviving son.

The Building of Bratton House

Philip married Sarah, the younger sister of Mary Aldridge. Sarah's father, John Aldridge, gave her and Philip a dowry of money, land and buildings and, perhaps, the land upon which Bratton House is built. However, this land did not extend beyond the broad gravel path which is presently to the rear of the house, nor to what is now the vegetable garden. Also, at least one small house and some small buildings existed on the Bratton House side of Melbourne Street. Probably Bratton House's gardens had not been levelled at that time and

so the land on which these houses and small buildings stood was not much higher than the road. Finally, there is reason to believe that a house or barn existed on the site of the present house as the exposed foundations seem to include parts of the walls of an earlier building.

Interestingly, there does not seem to have been a kitchen in the original part of the house. There is a medium-sized basement room, but it does not look ever to have been a kitchen unless the access then was very different from now because it seems not to have had easy access to the water well water, now within the house, or even to outside more generally. However, there is a doorway and steps leading out of the original house and down to where, presumably, a kitchen building stood, separated a few feet from the house in case of fire.



4. The Original Brickwork under the Render

Philip started to build Bratton House in 1716. He had the house designed in a Queen Anne style with a pattern of red and black bricks. Part of the cement render has been taken off to the left of the front door, exposing the original brickwork (see Picture 4).



5. Crest of the Ballards of Bishopstrow

One may see a crest over the front door of a griffin in a rampant position with a background known as ermine (see Picture 5). Evidently, this was a crest of the Ballards of Bishopstrow, near Warminster, and it is not certain whether Philip actually had the right to use it.

Unfortunately, Philip died young, in 1723, aged 47, and before Bratton House became habitable. So it was left, as part of his Bratton assets, to his son, John Aldridge Ballard, aged 12, to complete the house. Philip's assets in Imber were left to another son, John, and his assets in Upton Scudamore and West Ashton were left to another son, Jonathan.

The initials "PBS 1716" appear on a rainwater head on the left front of the house and relate to Philip & Sarah Ballard. The initials "IBA 1716" appear on a rainwater head on the right front of the house; these are the Latin initials of Philip's son, John Aldridge Ballard.

John Aldridge completed the house in 1732, the year he married Anne Frowde of Devizes, but had to rent out the house soon after to Robert Long of Steeple Ashton and move back to the house of Ballards' Home Living. Presumably, the cost of completing the house had been too great for him.

However, not content, by 1739, John Aldridge seems to have also taken on the remodeling of the front of the home living. His neighbour, Jeffery Whitaker, noted in his diary on the 22nd Oct 1739, 'Mr Ballard pulled down the front of his house to rebuild it,' and on the 26th Oct 1739, 'Mr Ballard uncovered the North side of his house to new Roof it.'

A stone plaque on the front of the house has the initials JAB 1739. Then, in 1740, he died of small pox. It seems that he left his wife with unpaid bills and the remodelling of the house incomplete. Whittaker noted in his diary on 24th November 1740 that "the workmen turn'd off, not paid nor not effects enough to pay his bonds".



6. William Aldridge's Plaque in the Garden

Whittaker commented on John Aldridge Ballard as follows: "He was stubborn & perverse in his temper, tyrannical in his

family. Arbitrary in the neighbourhood and when he had drink'd quarrelsome in company".

John Aldridge died intestate. Nevertheless, Bratton House passed to his son, William Aldridge Ballard, who was also a minor. William Aldridge seems to have extended the grounds as there is plague with his initials and an indecipherable date on the wall besides the steps down to the lower lawns (see Picture 6).

The Passing of Bratton House to the Seagrams

William Aldridge married Mary Band Woodyear in 1780. He passed the house to his only surviving child, Mary, upon his death in 1803. In April of that year, Mary married Edward Frowd Seagram, a medical doctor and magistrate of Warminster, giving him two children, named William Ballard and Julia, before dying in 1806 aged only 23 years. In 1808, Edward married Elizabeth Glasier, a granddaughter of a Whittaker of Bratton, who gave him a further four sons and two daughters. In 1831, Edward was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Wiltshire.



7. The 1808 Map showing Bratton House

Edward started to extend the house, adding a new dining room with a new kitchen underneath. The earliest map of Bratton in which individual houses may be seen is the 1808 map of the Seagram estate. The house is shown 'L' shaped and probably shows the new kitchen and dining room as the upstroke part of the 'L' (just under the number 1229 shown in Map 7).

The library came later with a store room underneath, built on the land of the original kitchen. Above the library was a pitched roof with bedrooms, probably for servants, accessed by a door whose outline can still be seen in a rear bedroom. He also covered the red and black brickwork of the original house in cement render. However, the extensions remained with un-rendered brickwork (see Picture 8). On a rainwater head between the extensions are the initials EFS and the date 1826. This rainwater head was moved higher by Wadham Diggle when he remodelled the floor over the library (see Picture 16, below).



8. Bratton House showing the Dining Room and Library Extensions in 1908

In 1827, Edward also swapped with the vicar of Westbury a parcel of land, which he owned in the Butts area of Westbury, for the parcel of land owned by the church, called the Vicarage Glebe, which Edward was already leasing. This parcel may have been the land which now is known as the Hut.

The Elopement of Octavius and Amelia

Edward's eighth born was Octavius who fell in love with Amelia, daughter of John Styles, who was five years older than he was. Earlier, in 1825, Edward had entered into a lease for 1, Melbourne Street (then called Tuckers) with the Longleat estate. The other signatories had been Amelia (then aged 15 years) and another of John's children (it was common practice in those days for leases to name the main tenant and the children of the sub-tenant).

It seems that John Styles' mother lived in one of the houses along the north side of Melbourne Street. This house or houses, which Edward bought and demolished in 1827 to incorporate the land into his garden, may be to the East of the present entrance, which was originally the entrance to the stables. The original gateway to Bratton House was further

down Melbourne Street. Yet further down the street were some small buildings, the foundations of which can still be seen in the retaining wall of the House's garden.

Edward refused to sanction the marriage and, in 1837, Octavius and Amelia ran away to Canada, with Octavius leaving first, and they married in Canada. It is claimed that Edward was furious and prevented Amelia's father from working in the village and so Styles had to move to Westbury Leigh where a son of his lived. However, there is evidence that in 1849 William, Edward's eldest son, made an additional payment to Styles for his mother's house, presumably because he felt that the original price was inadequate or as a means of helping the family of his brother's wife.

Octavius and Amelia had two sons, born at Fisher's Mills, Ontario, Joseph Emm and Edward Frowde. At least, at first, Octavius and Amelia did not seem to lack money because they bought two farms and a tavern in Fisher's Mills. It is unclear, but the money may have come from a trust set up by Edward Seagram for his grandchildren or from his marriage settlement with Elizabeth Glasier.

Also, they named their second son, Edward, either after Octavius' father or after a brother of the same name. Whether this was because there was no rift, or because Octavius hoped to repair relations with his father, is uncertain. Their first son seems to have been named after Joseph Emm who lived at 'Whites', now Reeves Farm. It is possible that Octavius and Amelia had also received help from him.

Despite any anger or regret by Edward senior, an allowance was given to keep and educate Octavius' children. There is continuing correspondence between Edward senior's daughter, Keren (short for Kerenhappuch!), and Octavius' family. Edward senior died in 1845 and



9. William Tassie's Boarding School

passed Bratton House to his eldest son, William. Octavius died in Canada three years later in 1848, aged only 30 years. Amelia then married John Barbour, but died soon after giving birth to her third child. Her husband was left with the 3 children. John Barbour, in a letter, did complain that the allowance was insufficient and that William did not realise that a Canadian Pound was worth only 16 shillings of British money. But the letter also shows that William took an active interest in the well-being of his two nephews and did write to the executors of their estate.

Joseph Emm lived in his teens at William Tassie's boarding school in Galt (see Picture 9). He then studied business at Buffalo in the state of New York. In 1864, he was employed to run the Granite flour mill and distillery at Waterloo, owned jointly by William Hespeler, George Randell, and William Roos. He married the daughter of Hespeler's sister, Stephanie Urbs.

Then Joseph (see Picture 10) bought out Hespeler in 1868 and the other two in, respectively 1873 and 1883, again reflecting that he did not lack money. The company became known as Joseph E Seagram & Sons. Gradually, distilling whisky became the main focus. By 1907, Seagram VO whisky became Canada's largest selling whisky. The VO stands for 'Very Own'; it was originally blended for the marriage of Joseph's son, Thomas, in 1907.



10. Joseph Emm Seagram

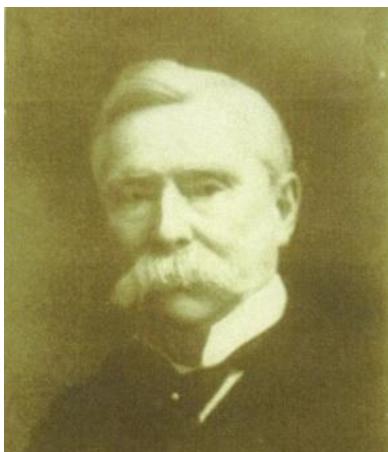


11. Bratton House, Willow Street, Waterloo, Canada

Joseph died in Waterloo on 18th August, 1919, aged 78. He was a millionaire, famous for his racehorses, and respected as a philanthropist. He bought his first racehorse when he was 16. But he never owned a car. In 1928, his heirs sold the company to Samuel Bronfman and the company was named The Distillers Corporation, but still traded its whisky under the name of Seagram. His heirs also sold the Canadian Bratton House (see Picture 11) which was pulled down and a church was built on the land.

As mentioned, William Ballard Seagram inherited Bratton House upon Edward senior's death in 1845. William seems to have been both religious and against strong drinks. He built a large chapel in the grounds, supposedly because he feared the influence of the Baptists on his employees who seemed to find the walk to Bratton Church on a Sunday too far.

Upon William's death, Bratton House went to his half-brother, Thomas, who, when he died, passed it on to William Heathcote Frowd Seagram (see Pictures 12 and 13), the son of a cousin, William Lye Seagram who had married Mary Ann Letitia Heathcote in Melksham in 1843.



12. William Heathcote Seagram

In 1882, William Heathcote Frowd Seagram obtained permission to reconfigure Sands Lane from turning east before what is now called the Hut to turning east to the north of the Hut. In doing this, he moved the right of way to the boundary of the house's garden.

William did not live all of the time in Bratton. He retained rooms at 86, Piccadilly in Central London.



13. The Obituary Notice of W H Seagram, Wilts News 30th Jan 1914

One of the properties, given by Aldridge to his new son-in-law, Philip Ballard, was the White Horse Inn (now known as the Duke Inn) and this inn had been passed down to William Heathcote Frowd Seagram. The area behind the Bratton War Memorial used to be another inn, owned by the Church, and originally called the Church House. In 1887, the Church sold the inn to Edward Smallcombe who renamed it, the Duke Inn. In 1891, William and Smallcombe agreed to swap the two inns with the White Horse changing its name to the Duke and William first turning the original Duke Inn into a coffee house before pulling it down and incorporating the land into the gardens of Bratton House.

Probably William Heathcote electrified the house. The first service was by a diesel generator charging DC batteries. The generator and accumulator rooms were in the one-storey building in the courtyard and an underground cable ran to the house. The cable is now used to take AC electricity from the house to the courtyard.



14. Wadham & Julia Diggle in the Library of Bratton House

The Passing of Bratton House to Wadham Diggle

William held Bratton House until his death in 1914 at the age of 70 years. He was unmarried and passed the house to Wadham Neston Diggle, whose mother was Georgiana Augusta Heathcote, sister of Mary Ann Letitia who had married William's father. Hence William and Wadham were cousins. Evidently, many Seagram heirlooms and silver went out of the family, which, according to a Canadian Seagram who met Horace Seymour, years later, generated considerable ill-feeling.

Wadham Diggle had been a lieutenant in the Navy. At the end of the 1860s, he was commander of HMS Boxer, patrolling the Pacific seaboard of Canada. In 1871, Diggle invested \$8,000 in a coal mine at Wellington on Vancouver Island with Robert Dunsmuir (the company was called Dunsmuir Diggle & Company). Dunsmuir had noticed a coal seam while on a fishing trip two years earlier and bought the mineral rights to Vancouver Island from the Hudson Bay Company (which did not know of the coal). In 1883, Diggle sold his share in the mine for \$600,000 (or about £53 million in today's money) and in April, he married, for a second time, Lily Julia Noble at Remenham in Buckinghamshire.

Incidentally, his eldest son Neston William was born in 1881 from an earlier marriage to Emma Cookson and who died only in 1963. When a midshipman in the Royal Navy, and only 16 years old, Neston was invited to participate in the procession marking Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee through London in 1897. He rose to the rank of captain and was awarded the Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George for his performance in the Dover Patrol and action off Belgium during the First World War.

Upon retirement, he became a director of the British based mining company Berwick Moreing and later the Australian gold mining company Sons of Gwalia Limited in Western Australia. The Sons of Gwalia has an interesting history. It was established in 1896 (Gwalia is a poetic name for Wales) by a group of miners who named the mine in thanks to their financier who was Welsh. These miners sold the mine to a GW Hall for £5,000.



15. Bratton House showing the blind windows flanking the library window and the floor above rebuilt by Diggle.

Hall approached Berwick Moreing and they sent out their geologist, Herbert Hoover (later to be President of the USA), to look at it. He secured an option on the mine for £200,000. The mine proved to be very valuable and became the largest gold mine outside of Kalgoorlie, producing 2.5 million ounces of gold, as well as lithium, tin, and tantalum. The mine closed in 1963, but in 1981 mining was restarted till 2004.

Gwalia is now a ghost town and a tourist attraction.

Although the library dates from 1826, the Italian Renaissance style chimney piece was put in by the Diggles and probably the Diggles put into the house another three quality chimney pieces. The Diggles also rebuilt the floor over the library, inserted the blind windows flanking the west facing library window and added mouldings and a balustrade over the extension to match ones on the original part of the house (see Picture 15).



16. Rainwater Head with EFS 1826 which Diggle moved higher when he rebuilt the floor over the library

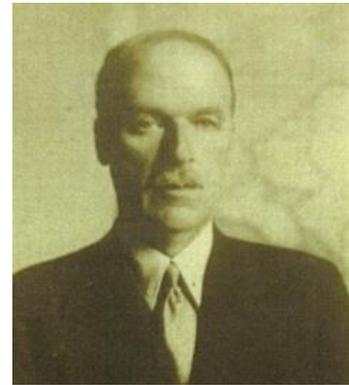
During the First World War, the 26 Divisional Cyclists

Company was billeted at Bratton House under the command of a Major Smith. The Diggles moved to another of their houses, Longparish House in Hampshire. There are letters of complaint to the Ministry of War about damage to Bratton House and seeking compensation. It seems that by the end of 1915, the soldiers were moved on.

Wadham Diggle donated the Bratton War Memorial to the village.

Sir Horace and Violet Seymour

Wadham Diggle died in 1934. It seems that their son did not want the house and Lily Diggle sold it to Sir Horace and Violet Seymour in 1935 (see Pictures 17 and 18). Lily died on 25th January 1942 at the Manor House, Hurley, near Maidenhead (she was 86 years old).



17. Sir Horace Seymour

Sir Horace was the 'Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary' to Persia between 1936 and 1939 and British Ambassador to China during the crucial years 1942 to 1946. Between April and July 1947, he was a member of the Franco-Siamese Boundary



18. Violet Seymour in the UK Embassy in Chungking, China

Commission. He was invested as a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (C.V.O.) and as a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (G.C.M.G.).

As part of the conveyance of Bratton House from Diggle to Seymour was the 13 acres of Fitzroy Farm in the parish of Edington, 4 cottages (1, 5, 7, and 9 Melbourne Street).



19. The Garden House design by Norman Evill

The Melbourne Street cottages had been part of the Longleat estate and presumably bought by Diggle after the First World War.

The Garden House (see Picture 19) was designed by Norman Evill around 1935, as were the bookcases in the library (possibly around the same time or a bit later). Norman Evill had worked with Edwin Lutyens for three years from 1899 when they both followed the Arts and Craft style.



20. The State Bedroom designed by Edith Bowes-Lyon

The Seymours also asked Edith, wife of Geoffrey Bowes-Lyon, cousin of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, to redesign the dining room, which was given a painted burnt orange ceiling and woven material stretched on the walls, and the state bedroom with a four poster bed on a raised dais and cream coloured painted floor and walls (see Picture 20). The curtains and the drapes of the poster bed were hung with shiny-creamy-gold satin, while the bed covers were grey satin (an effect which was reminiscent of Syrie Maugham and her circle in the 1920s and 1930s).

Bratton House during the Second World War

In about 1941, during the Second World War, Sir Horace Seymour allowed St Mary's Convent in Hampstead to reside in the House. The Seymours also owned Luccombe Mill House in the village and, while the school was in Bratton House, they resided at the mill house when in England. The school had initially been evacuated to Lady Catherine Ashburnham's house in East Sussex, but Lady Ashburnham resented the intrusion and there were conflicts over the use of firewood during the bitter winter of 1940.



21. Sister Gregory Kirkus

One of the teachers was Sister Gregory Kirkus (see Picture 21) who kept a diary of the time at Bratton House. The dining room was just able to sit all the girls. The sitting room became the chapel, but could not by any means contain all the girls, many of whom had to be in the hall and listen to the service through the open door. The library became the common room for the upper school. An outhouse with a boiler became the 'Annie

Laurie Laundry' where Sister Anne and Sister Laurence did all the clothes washing. Almost all rooms had to

serve two purposes. During the day, the rooms were for classes and at night for sleeping. It meant that nothing could be left out; all the bed linen had to be folded up and put away each morning.

Mother Teresita slept in a box room which held Sir Horace's befeathered Ambassadorial Hat among other things. Sister Kirkus slept for five years on one of the sofas in the Library. Despite the size of Bratton House, some girls were lodged with Bratton residents and at Luccombe Mill House. A few local children also attended the school.

Two pianos were hauled up and through the window of the room above the coach house to form a music room. The garage became the gymnasium, once Sir Horace removed his Rolls Royce. The story goes that Sir Horace was rarely in England and so, equally rarely, was the Rolls taken out of the garage. But one day, when he did take it out, the nuns quickly started a gym lesson in the garage and, when he returned, he understood the point and took the car away.

As children and teachers increased in number, school life became more normal. The nuns could cover the ordinary classroom subjects, a dancing teacher was found and Mother Teresita's choir won an award at Bath. Not only was there a Nativity Play at Christmas and a Pantomime in January (both in the village hall) but, in the summer, there was a Corpus Christi Procession, and, afterwards, parents and villagers were invited to outdoor entertainments of acting, singing and dancing.

Mother Michael was charged with finding interesting people, such as a book illustrator, a poet and an authoress, to give talks to the school. There were no sports facilities except the single hard tennis court, and no science lessons. But there was, as Sister Kirkus described, "the wonderful countryside spread around us". "Here were", she says, "incredible natural riches and we all became interested in wild flowers, birds and butterflies. Walks and bicycle rides were a joy. Sometimes there were picnics on the sunny Downs. Everything, of course, was shared with the children, who were with us for term and holidays alike". As Sister Kirkus was the youngest member of the community, she led most of the bicycle expeditions. "There was almost no traffic on the roads which added to the joy of rural life" she recalled.

Their spiritual life was cared for by Canon John Hudson, the local catholic parish priest. He had a curate who said daily Mass for the parish, so the Canon took the school under his wing and drove over to say Mass every morning. When the weather was very bad he would stay overnight in the village pub. On Sundays, there was a Benediction and a Sermon. "If

one was nodding off on a hot afternoon, the words ‘I knew a man’ brought instant attention for he had a fund of interesting stories”. As well as looking after the school, Canon Hudson would visit prisoner of war camps, for instance, the Italians at Devizes Castle, in order to give the prisoners the sacraments and help them to write letters home.

“Food was rationed. When one of the nuns, Mother Michael reached her Silver Jubilee, Mother Cecilia came for the celebration. She found that Sister Austin, the cook, had produced a cake and other delicacies, and she congratulated her. ‘You would not know there was a war on’, she said. ‘They will know next week’ was Sister Austin’s grim reply, for she had used up all her reserves”.

The children never starved, but never had quite enough to eat, so the nuns were always on the look-out for ways of adding to the provisions. When a Luccombe swan electrocuted itself, they made sure of the cause of death and then cooked it. Evidently, it was rather tough! All the other ‘extras’ were vegetarian. Nettle stalks were stripped and boiled to make something like spinach, mushrooms were occasionally found, and there was a tree in a little lane about half a mile away that bore little wild green plums. The nuns carried a step ladder to the lane and stripped the tree of all its fruit! But blackberries were their chief source of fruit as they grew in superabundance in the hedges below Bratton House, and they spent many an afternoon filling their baskets with them.



22. Frank Biggs & Cox

After the War the school moved to Shaftsbury and Sister Kirkus became headmistress in 1953.

After the War

After returning to Bratton House, Sir Horace decided to reduce his properties:- Fitzroy Farm was sold to Harry Cornish in 1951.

- 1, Melbourne Street was sold to Hamnet Chadwich in 1955.
- 7, Melbourne Street was sold to Kathleen Reed and Marjorie Fry in 1965.
- 9, Melbourne Street was also sold.
- Luccombe View (now called Emms House) was passed to Mr & Mrs Frank Biggs in 1965 (Mr Biggs was the head gardener, see Picture 22).

To the rear of the house, there is a plaque with the monogram HS (presumably Horace Seymour) on it.

- 5, Melbourne Street was passed to Mr & Mrs Wilfred (“Frank”) Knight in 1971 (see Picture 23).

The Knights had been the caretakers at Bratton House and had lived in the basement. Frank Knight had been a railwayman and Horace had been on the lookout for somebody who understood boilers to maintain the temperamental central heating boiler.



23. Frank & Edna Knight, Newspaper photograph on their golden wedding anniversary

The Seymours entertained various foreign dignitaries at Bratton House. One of note was the fourth wife of the Chinese Nationalists leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who was called Soong May-ling. She was known for bringing several sets of her own silk bed sheets with her upon her travels and used to insist that they were put on her bed and changed every time she slept, or even sat, on the bed. Evidently, Mrs Seymour refused to wash the sheets, stating she did not run a Chinese laundry. Similar stories relating to bed sheets exist of May-ling’s stays at the White House in Washington.



24. Lord and Lady Loch in the dining room of Bratton House

About 1967, the Seymours built a new bungalow beside Bratton House as an intended residence which would be more congenial as they grew older. But Horace Seymour, at the last moment, changed his mind. He died at Bratton House in 1979, only then did Violet move to the Hut.

A Seymour family counsel decided to make Luccombe Mill their home and Bratton House was sold to The Right Hon Spencer Douglas, 4th Baron Loch of Drylaw. Lord Loch died in 1991 and Bratton House passed to his wife, The Right Honourable Davina Julia Baroness Loch, until 1997 when Baroness Loch sold Bratton House to Paul Langridge. His executors then sold Bratton House in 2004.