

### C. Joseph Ball II's Letter Book

1. Joseph Ball II was the grandson of Colonel William Ball and Hannah Atherold. He was born in Virginia on 11 March 1689 (8½ years after the death of Colonel William) and died in England on 10 January 1760.

His father was Colonel William's youngest son, Joseph. Around 1709 he came to London, where he married Frances Ravenscroft. Although he was in Virginia winding-up his late father's affairs in 1711, he returned to England where his three children were born 1717-1720 and was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1720. He was in the Colony in 1722 and was called to the bar in England in 1726. By the early 1730s Ball had returned to Virginia. After another stay in England for eighteen months around 1737, which followed a family dispute resulting in a court fine in 1735, he again returned to the Colony, building a family gallery in St. Mary's Whitechapel in 1740, before settling permanently in England in the autumn of 1743.<sup>C1</sup>

2. Joseph Ball II's letter book contains drafts or copies of letters which he wrote while in England from 1744 up to his death in 1760.<sup>C2</sup> Ball employed his nephew, Joseph Chinn, to manage his estate and business affairs in Virginia, and much of the letter book is taken-up by detailed correspondence with Chinn about the management of his plantations and the care and discipline of his slaves.

His instructions to Chinn reveal a marked propensity to micro-manage. As Freeman observes: "This young man either possessed vast patience or else suffered grievous necessity. Nothing less would have kept him at his new task in the face of the endless instruction, the carping complaint and the shackling restrictions imposed by the absentee proprietor."<sup>C3</sup>

His correspondence with Chinn also demonstrates his remarkable powers of recall. Per Freeman again: "Joseph Ball had amazing memory of detail. He remembered even the old garments he had packed away in Virginia and when he was occasionally in the mood of philanthropy he would direct Chinn to look in a specified chest for a particular garment and to give it to a designated individual."<sup>C4</sup>

3. The significance of the letter book relative to the ancestry of the Balls of Virginia is that it reveals that:

(a) Colonel William left a 'little book' in his own hand containing entries recording his marriage and the births of his children;

(b) Joseph Ball II felt there was a connection between the Virginia Balls and the Balls of Barkham (although with what degree of conviction is not known);

(c) he acquired what he believed to be a portrait of an uncle of Colonel William from a kinswoman in 1750;

(d) he was not certain of his grandmother Hannah's maiden name and originally thought that it was 'Atherall' or 'Athereth'.

The letter book otherwise does not contain any information about Joseph Ball II's genealogical researches in England (as to which see Sections G.21 to G.24).

4. A letter of instructions from Joseph Ball II to 'Couz. Jos.' Chinn dated 17 July 1745 includes the following request:<sup>C5</sup>

*"I defire you to look into Col.<sup>o</sup> Ball's Little book again very carefully, and see if my Grandmother's maiden name was not Hannah Athereth in stead of Atherall; for I think I remember, that I have seen it so in that book."*

It seems that Joseph Chinn failed to comply with his uncle's request, since Joseph Ball II found it necessary to repeat his request in a letter dated 16 March 1746/47:<sup>C6</sup>

*"You muft needs search my Grandfather's little book, that Col.<sup>o</sup> Ball had; and let me know certainly whether my Grandmothers maiden name was Atherall or Athereth."*

Although this subsequent letter had probably not yet reached Joseph Chinn in Virginia, a little more than two months later, on 23 May 1747, an increasingly frustrated Joseph Ball II felt moved to remonstrate with his nephew in the following terms:<sup>C7</sup>

*"I herewith send you Copies of the Two laft Letters I wrote you. I have Little to add now; but that I think it a hard Cafe, that you Can't find in your heart to satisfy me out of my Grandfather's Little Book (late in pofsefsion of Col.<sup>o</sup> Ball) where there are the Entries of his marriage, and the births of his Children, with his own hand, what my Grand Mother's Maiden Name was. I would not thank you, to tell me that George Ball tells you so and so, or that you believe, or dare say, so or so; but you muft Infpect the book with your own Eyes, and write me pofitively and point blank how it is: It will be no such Great matter if you go to George Ball's on purpofe. But you are so very wife, that you think it not worthwhile, I fuppofe, though I have been so Erneft with you about it, and, I think, I should know as well as you."*

For good measure, on 18 August 1747 Joseph Ball II again took his nephew to task:<sup>C8</sup>

*"I think it is a hard Cafe that you Can't afford to send me a true account of my Grandmother's Maiden Name from my Grandfather's little book in the pofsefsion of George Ball. Pray don't think much of so small a matter to oblige."*

5. Walne cites the letters dated 17 July 1745 and 23 May 1747,<sup>C9</sup> while both Hayden and Walne cite a letter written by Joseph Ball II to his cousin, Mrs Ellen (Ball) Chichester, "in 1745".<sup>C10</sup> The latter reference, which Walne probably copied from Hayden, is erroneous, as Joseph Ball II's correspondence with Mrs Ellen Chichester related to the complicated, and contentious, nature of her late husband's affairs in England.

6. Joseph Ball II's interest in his family ancestry is also exemplified by the following request to Joseph Chinn in a letter dated 14 November 1746:<sup>C11</sup>

"I would have you send me the two Coats of Arms in the Prefs in my Chamber." The request was accompanied by characteristically detailed instructions for packing in a secure manner.

7. Joseph Ball II's quest to discover his family origins in England led in 1750 to a kinswoman called Mrs Johnson, who was living at Wokingham, coincidentally the early home of the Berkshire Balls.

It seems that Mrs Johnson had in her possession a portrait and a pair of gloves, reputedly of an uncle of Joseph Ball II's paternal grandfather, Colonel William. In the correspondence in his letter book, Joseph Ball II's grandfather's uncle is only identified as 'Mr Ball', but on the basis that Joseph Ball II believed that Colonel William Ball of Millenbeck was descended from the Balls of Berkshire, his grandfather's uncle would have been one of the four brothers of William Ball of Lincoln's Inn. See Section E.6.

8. The family relationship between Joseph Ball II and Mrs Johnson of Wokingham is unclear. As is well known, his father, Colonel Joseph Ball I, had married, secondly, a widow called Mary Johnson around 1707. The issue of their marriage was Mary Ball, born around 1708, the mother of George Washington.

Mary (Johnson) Ball already had two children from her earlier marriage, Elizabeth and John Johnson, who appear to have been born in the 1690s.<sup>C12</sup>

Joseph Ball I died in 1711. Within a year of her second husband's decease Mary (Johnson) Ball had married Captain Richard Hewes of Northumberland county. He was in failing health, and died around 1713. Mary (Johnson Ball) Hewes did not marry again, and died in 1721.

The Johnson surname was not perpetuated by either of Mary (Johnson Ball) Hewes's children by Mr Johnson. Elizabeth Johnson was twice married, while her brother, John Johnson, died young and unmarried a few months after the death of his mother.<sup>C13</sup>

9. Joseph Ball II visited Mrs Johnson in Wokingham to inspect the portrait of 'Mr Ball' at first hand, and expressed himself satisfied that the painting was indeed of his grandfather's uncle as evidenced by his subsequent letter to Mrs Johnson dated 5 July 1750:<sup>C14</sup>

"Madam

*"As you were so Genteel when I was at Wokingham to tell me that you would not withhold M.<sup>r</sup> Ball's Picture & Gloves from me as I was of the family (and I am fully perfuaded that he was my Grandfather's Uncle) If you will make me a Prefent of his Picture and Gloves, I will make you a Prefent of some thing that shall be as good, or Better to you: But if you don't like this Propofal, pleafe to let me know what is the Loweft you will take for them in Mony, and I will tell you whether I will give it or not. I think they would moft properly be placed with me. The anfwer I requeft will be short; pleafe to let me have it soon: and there shall be no delay on my side. If you direct to me at Stratford by London it will be fufficient. I am Good Madam y.<sup>r</sup> h[um]ble serv.<sup>t</sup>,*

JOSEPH BALL

"Stratford by London  
July 5.<sup>th</sup> 1750.  
To M.<sup>rs</sup> Johnfon at Wokingham Berks"

Joseph Ball II was so determined to secure the portrait that he also sought to enlist the assistance of the vicar of Wokingham, the Rev.<sup>d</sup> William Pennington, and wrote the following less than discrete letter to him dated 7 July 1750:<sup>C15</sup>

"Good Sir

"I hope you have before this time inquired, or soon will, of the Steward, whether William Ball about the year 1480 or Edward [sic] Ball soon after were Lords of the Mannor of Barkham; and will be so good as to let me know how that matter is.

"I have writ to M.<sup>rs</sup> Johnfon about M.<sup>r</sup> Ball's Picture and Gloves, that as she had told me ~~that~~ as I was of the family, she would not withhold them from me, If she would make me a Prefent of them, I would make her a Prefent of some thing else ~~that~~ ~~should be~~ as good or better for her: and if she did not like that propofal, If she would let me know her loweft price in mony, I would tell her whether I would give it or not: and defired her anfwer soon. I beg you will be so good as to speak to her about it; and that she will let me know what she will do. If you direct to me at Stratford by London, it will be sufficient. I am

y.<sup>r</sup> h[um]ble serv.<sup>t</sup>,

JOSEPH BALL

"Stratford 7.<sup>th</sup> July 1750.  
To the Reverend M.<sup>r</sup> Pennington  
Vicar of Wokingham Berks."

Joseph Ball II's delicate negotiations were attended by success as Mrs Johnson accepted five guineas for the portrait and gloves.<sup>C16</sup> The agreement was confirmed by the below letter dated 28 August 1750:<sup>C17</sup>

"Mad.<sup>m</sup>

"I rec.<sup>d</sup> your Let.<sup>r</sup> If you will at your own Coft and Charge send me M.<sup>r</sup> Ball's Picture and Gloves up to M.<sup>r</sup> Hayler's in King Street, upon his Delivering them in good order to me, I will pay him Five Guineas for your ufe. Pleafe to send them soon, elfe I shall be from home. I am

y.<sup>r</sup> h[um]ble serv.<sup>t</sup>,

JOSEPH BALL

"Stratf.<sup>d</sup> by London  
28.<sup>th</sup> Aug.<sup>t</sup> 1750.  
To M.<sup>rs</sup> Johnfton at Wokingham Berks

"NB. She soon after sent me the Picture and Gloves, and I paid M.<sup>r</sup> Haylor the mony."

Joseph Ball II's above letter to his kinswoman is somewhat legalistic and lacking any warmth, suggesting the absence of a personal relationship even though he was 'of the family'.

10. We do not know if Joseph Ball II received any response to his enquiry about whether the Balls were ever lords of the manor of Barkham.<sup>C18</sup> It is a matter of conjecture how far back the manorial records held by the Steward might have gone in 1750. The records which survive to the present time are the minutes of the Court Baron from 1738 to 1830<sup>C19</sup> and the roll of estreats and quit rents 1593-1699.<sup>C20</sup>

Joseph Ball II's information about William Ball (reputedly died 1480) and Edward Ball was almost certainly derived from the pedigree of the Balls of Berkshire recorded by William Ball of Lincoln's Inn at the Visitation of London around 1634 (see Section G.22), although there is no mention in the pedigree of William Ball having been lord of the manor of Barkham.<sup>C21</sup>

Joseph Ball II's enquiry about Edward Ball is curious, as according to the pedigree Edward was the second son of William Ball's son, Robert Ball of Barkham, who was head of the family from 1480 to 1543 (1546 per the parish registers) and was succeeded on his death by his eldest son, William Ball of Wokingham. See Section E.1. It may be that Joseph Ball II really intended his enquiry to relate to Robert Ball but mistakenly wrote 'Edward'.

11. It seems that Colonel William and his wife, Hannah, had been interred in unmarked graves. In 1754 Joseph Ball II decided that the graves of his grandparents ought to be properly marked by a gravestone. A letter to Joseph Chinn dated 13 May 1754 contains the following request:<sup>C22</sup>

*"I would have you out of hand take a good hand or two with you, and go down to the Plantation where my Grandfather and mother lived and are buried; and get the assistance of Hannah Dennis to shew you as nigh as she can the spot where they are buried; and let the hands skim the ground over about four or five inches deep; and if you come over the graves you will find the ground of a different Colour. If you can find that, then stake it out at the four Corners with sound Locuft or Cedar stakes, that you may be sure to find it again; for I think to send a stone to put over them. Pray take diligent Care of this affair, and you will oblige."*

As usual, Joseph Ball II had to chase his nephew, and his letter to Joseph Chinn dated 21 February 1755 includes the following reminder:<sup>C23</sup>

*"I hope you have found out, and markt the place where my Grand father and Grand mother are buried. I have that matter at heart, that I may shew the Respect due to them."*

For good measure, he added another reminder in his letter to his nephew dated 4 April 1755:<sup>C24</sup>

*"P.S. I believe Hannah Dennis Can shew you pretty near where my Grandfather & Grandmother ly. If you Can find the place, stake it out, that you may find it again, as I directed in a former Letter."*

It appears that some positive identification of the site of the graves must have been made, as on 5 August 1755 Joseph Ball II uncharacteristically congratulated his nephew in the following terms:<sup>C25</sup>

*"You have done well about my Grandfather's & GrandMother's Graves: I would have you futher take a hand with you, and Dig pretty deep to see if you can find any bones (for I would be sure of the place before I lay the Stone) and then fill the graves up again if you find any."*

Unfortunately, it seems that no bones were discovered, and Joseph Ball II sent further instructions to Chinn in his letter dated 22 October 1756:<sup>C26</sup>

*"I would have you dig a little deeper where my Grandfather & Grandmother were supposed to be buried; and if you find no bones there, try some other place where you may be directed."*

The subject is not referred to again by Joseph Ball II in his letter book.

12. Joseph Ball II died on 10 January 1760, aged 70. In his letter to Joseph Chinn advising him of his uncle's death dated 12 March 1760,<sup>C27</sup> his son-in-law, Rawleigh Downman, revealed that latterly Joseph Ball II had invested heavily in property development in the City of London without taking advice, incurring extensive debts.

Joseph Ball II made his will in 1750,<sup>C28</sup> shortly before his daughter, Frances, married Rawleigh Downman. He appointed Frances sole executrix and made her sole beneficiary, apart from a bequest of £20 to Joseph Chinn.<sup>C29</sup>

When Rawleigh Downman originally sought Joseph Ball II's consent to marry his daughter, he refused. Eventually he relented, but not before Frances was 30 years old, and wrote to Rawleigh Downman in Virginia on 16 January 1749/50 in the following terms: *"If you think Good to come over hither, I will oppofe your Marrying of her no Longer; but upon Condition that you will let her stay here with her Mother, as Long as her Mother Lives, who is now in the seventieth year of her age and very Infirm."*<sup>C30</sup> Rawleigh Downman continued to use his father-in-law's letter book until shortly before his own death in 1781.

13. Hayden makes slight reference to Joseph Ball II's family Bible, but the available extracts do not contain any information about Colonel William's English ancestry.<sup>C31</sup>

14. Joseph Ball II is best remembered, of course, for advising his half-sister, Mary (Ball) Washington, against sending her son, George, then aged 15, to sea, thereby influencing the course of American history.<sup>C32</sup>

