

## G. Balls of Virginia

### *Primary sources*

1. Tradition has it that in the 1650s 'Colonel' William Ball went to Virginia, founding a line which was to produce the mother of George Washington.

The English ancestry of 'Colonel' William is, however, uncertain. The earliest surviving family records concerning the family pedigree, and when 'Colonel' William emigrated from England, which date from the period 1744 to 1789, in chronological order are:

- (a) Joseph Ball II's letter book;
- (b) Downman family Bible;
- (c) Inscription on the reverse of Colonel William's 'illuminated parchment';
- (d) Letter from Colonel James Ball Jr. of 'Bewdley'.

2. While Joseph Ball II's letter book, which covers his final years of residence in England from 1744 until his death in 1760, evidences his interest in genealogy (see Section C), the letter book itself contains no genealogical information except it reveals that Joseph Ball II originally believed that his grandmother's maiden name was 'Atherall' or 'Athereth'.<sup>G1</sup>

3. The entry in the Downman family Bible appears to have been written between 1776 and 1783, a century after Colonel William's death (see Section D). This recites the pedigree of the Balls of Berkshire as recorded by William Ball of Lincoln's Inn before the Heralds around 1634. There is also brief mention of Colonel William's marriage and three surviving children. Page 3 of the Bible says that "Col. William Ball emigrated to Virginia in the year 1657". It also records his death in 1680.

4. As regards the information in the Downman family Bible:

- (a) There is no mention (or drawing) of the coat of arms of the Balls of Berkshire which also appears in the relevant entry in the visitation book at the College of Arms.
- (b) The recitation of the pedigree of the Balls of Berkshire includes the erroneous addition that William Ball of Barkham who is said to have died in 1480 was lord of the manor of Barkham.
- (c) The Bible refers to 'Colonel' William marrying Hannah Atherold (rather than Hannah Atherall or Hannah Athereth), although the place and date of marriage are not mentioned.
- (d) There is no mention of his first son, Richard, and no information about when his children were born.
- (e) There is nothing to substantiate the statement that 'Colonel' William emigrated to Virginia in 1657.

Various subsequent writers, including Freeman and Fischer, have accepted 1657 as the definite date of migration of 'Colonel' William.<sup>G2</sup>

5. When William Ball came to Virginia, he is said to have brought with him a handsomely illuminated engraving, on parchment, of the coat of arms of his family.<sup>G3</sup> On the reverse of the 'illuminated parchment' (which in Hayden's time was owned by Mr James Flexmer Ball of Ditchley)<sup>G4</sup> is the following inscription (as reproduced by Meade and Lossing):<sup>G5</sup>

*"The coat of arms of Colonel William Ball, who came from England with his family about the year 1650, and settled at the mouth of Corotoman River, in Lancaster county, Virginia, and died in 1669, leaving two sons, William and Joseph, and one daughter, Hannah, who married Daniel Fox. William left eight sons (and one daughter), five of whom have now (Anno Domini 1779) male issue. Joseph's male issue is extinct. General George Washington is his grandson, by his youngest daughter, Mary. Colonel Burgess Ball is the only child of Jeduthun, who was the third and youngest son of James, the third son of said William."*

6. The inscription gives rise to a number of comments:

(a) Although neither Meade nor Lossing identifies the author of the inscription, if it is dated 1779 then it was probably written within a couple of years before or after the entry in the Downman family Bible and precedes by ten years the letter from Colonel James Ball Jr. of 'Bewdley' to Colonel Burgess Ball in 1789 containing details of the family pedigree (see paragraph 7 below).

(b) Hayden, who appears to have inspected the 'illuminated parchment' for himself, says that the inscription was written by Colonel Burgess Ball.<sup>G6</sup>

(c) According to the inscription, 'Colonel' William came from England "with his family" about the year 1650.

(d) The inscription states that Colonel William died in 1669 whereas he actually died in 1680.<sup>G7</sup>

(e) The inscription also states that Colonel William's daughter, Hannah, married Daniel Fox whereas her husband's name was Captain David Fox.

(f) There is no reference to Colonel William's first son, Richard.

(g) The inscription throws no light on the English ancestry of Colonel William.

7. The death of Mary (Ball) Washington ('old Mrs Washington') in 1789 seems to have revived interest in her ancestry and the rest of the family pedigree by Colonel Burgess Ball and his uncle, Colonel James Ball Jr. of 'Bewdley' (whose wife, Fanny, was the granddaughter of Joseph Ball II).

As a result Colonel James Ball Jr. wrote a letter to his nephew dated 11 September 1789 setting out an extended family pedigree.<sup>G8</sup> The genealogical information in the letter includes the following:<sup>G9</sup>

*"Mrs Washington's grandfather, Col William Ball was the first of the family who came to Virginia, and settled near the mouth of Corotoman River. It appears from a memorandum of Joseph Ball Esq., that he married in London the 2nd day of July, 1638, a Miss Hannah Atherall: by whom he had Richard, who it is supposed died an infant, as he is not mentioned in his father's will; William born the 2nd of June 1641; Joseph born the 25th of May, 1649; and Hannah born about the middle of March 1650; but whether they were born in England or Virginia I cannot learn. William the 2nd son of the 1st of that name married a Miss Williamson an Englishwoman, by whom he had William, Richard, James, Joseph, George, David, Margaret, Stretchley and Samuel."*

It may be significant that Colonel James Ball Jr.:

- (a) gives no date as to when Colonel William first came to Virginia;
- (b) describes Colonel William as "the first of the family" to come to Virginia;
- (c) mentions Richard first in the list of Colonel William's children (which appears to be in conventional chronological order) and subsequently describes William (born 1641) as Colonel William's second son;
- (d) is silent on the subject of the English ancestry of Colonel William.

8. The 'memorandum of Joseph Ball Esq.' does not survive. If it was written by Joseph Ball II, which is more than likely, it is quite possible that the above information about Colonel William's family was derived from his 'little book', which Joseph Ball II was so anxious that his nephew, Joseph Chinn, should inspect at first hand on his behalf, as it contained entries "of his marriage, and the births of his Children, with his own hand".<sup>G10</sup> See Section C.4.

It is tempting to think that Colonel James Ball Jr.'s letter may provide a glimpse of what was contained in Colonel William's 'little book', but it is curious why the information about Richard is so vague, although the omission of his date of birth could be an oversight. If he was not mentioned in his father's will, it does not follow that he died an infant, rather that he predeceased Colonel William or else had been separately provided for or was estranged. Richard, in fact, lived until 1677 (see Sections H.5 and H.6), predeceasing his father by three years.

James and Fanny Ball clearly believed that the maiden name of old Mrs Washington's paternal grandmother was 'Atherall' since their third son, born 1785 (nearly four years before the letter dated 11 September 1789), was named 'Atherall'.<sup>G11</sup>

9. Colonel James Ball Jr.'s letter is the only primary source which mentions the dates of birth of Colonel William's children, other than Richard's, although it is specifically stated that William was his second son. In this case Richard would need to have been born in 1639 or 1640. Hayden and Freeman do not dispute that Richard was the eldest son.<sup>G12</sup> In Hayden's later article he describes William as 'Colonel' William's eldest son, "having doubtless come to Virginia with his father, in 1657",<sup>G13</sup> probably

in the mistaken belief that Richard "who died young", and whom he lists first in a family entry later on the same page, was already deceased, on which basis William would have been his eldest surviving son.

On the other hand, Mann believes,<sup>G14</sup> as the Dictionary of Virginia Biography impliedly does,<sup>G15</sup> that William was Colonel William's eldest son and that Richard was his next son, in which case he would need to have been born between 1642 and 1648. Mann reaches this conclusion on the grounds that according to family tradition "the eldest son of the Ball family was always named William" and the "second eldest was named Richard", and opines that son William "moved steadfastly in the customs of his time, patterning his life in the manner of all eldest sons, to be the future head of the family".<sup>G16</sup>

The weakness of this proposition is that it depends on projecting backwards the subsequent family tradition as to christian names and cannot be substantiated. There is evidence that child-naming practices in colonial Virginia, whereby the majority of first-born children were named after their grandparents and second-born children after their parents, were similar to naming customs in southern and midlands England.<sup>G17</sup> As it happens, it seems that William was better suited to public duty than his elder brother, Richard, who appears to have been a more adventurous spirit (see Section H).

### ***Emigration to Virginia***

10. There is evidence that 'Colonel' William was in Virginia, albeit not accompanied by his family, in the early 1650s, as on 10 December 1653 he witnessed a deed in Lancaster county.<sup>G18</sup> The Dictionary of Virginia Biography believes that he "was almost certainly involved in the tobacco trade between London and Virginia before the 1650s",<sup>G19</sup> while Heck and Mann suggest that he may have been a ship's captain, although without adducing any specific evidence.<sup>G20</sup>

There are subsequent Lancaster county records of his witnessing "some deeds here and there",<sup>G21</sup> including the will of Arthur Dunn made 16 November 1655, which also mentions a trade debt due to 'William Ball' of £400 payable in tobacco and cash. Dunn died shortly afterwards, and on 15 April 1656 William Ball and his fellow witness appeared before the Lancaster county court to affirm the due execution of the will.<sup>G22</sup>

It seems that 'Colonel' William made four trips between England and Virginia around 1656, on one of which he brought his eldest son, Richard, to the Colony, as a subsequent entry in the Lancaster County Orders Book in May 1657 records: "A certificate according to Act is granted to William Ball for the transportation of himself four times, and also for the transport of Hugh Danys and Richard Ball."<sup>G23</sup> If Richard was born in 1639 or 1640, he would have been around 16 or 17 in 1656.

11. 'Colonel' William does not appear in the tithable lists until 1658.<sup>G24</sup> Despite not becoming a landowner in Lancaster county until around 1663, he must have successfully integrated himself into the social hierarchy of the Colony for on 30 March 1659 he was sworn as a Justice for Lancaster county.<sup>G25</sup>

12. Around 1660 'Colonel' William's youngest son, Joseph, was apparently sent to join his father in Virginia, as an entry in the Lancaster County Orders Book in January 1660/61 records the grant of a certificate to William Ball for the transportation of twenty people, including Joseph Ball.<sup>G26</sup> If the genealogical information in Colonel James Ball Jr.'s letter is correct, Joseph would have been aged around eleven, which raises the question who would have looked after him during the voyage and, no less important, once he had arrived in Lancaster county? Joseph's adult career in Virginia does not suggest that he shared the more adventurous spirit of his elder brother, Richard.

It is unlikely that there were two Joseph Balls who emigrated to Lancaster county, and there is no evidence of the transportation of another Joseph Ball at a later date. It is possible that the information in Colonel James Ball Jr.'s letter is inaccurate as regards Joseph's date of birth, despite his evident attention to detail, and that Joseph was born earlier than 1649.

'Colonel' William would doubtless have employed great care in choosing a dependable master and ship to transport young Joseph. If his son was only aged eleven when he came to Virginia, it is virtually inconceivable that at least one of the nineteen other people (who included eight women) who were transported at the same time was not a close relative charged with looking after Joseph's welfare.

One can only speculate as to why Joseph was sent to join his father and eldest brother in Virginia at such a young age, when his education was far from complete, while his mother and other elder brother, William, remained in England for another five years.

13. Intriguingly, there is evidence that shortly before Joseph's arrival in Virginia, 'Colonel' William and Richard were engaged in the acquisition of land in Maryland. On 16 July 1659 conditional warrants for land there were granted to ten claimants, all seemingly from Lancaster county, Virginia, including William Ball (500 acres) and Richard Ball (500 acres). On 15 February 1659/60 William Ball was granted a patent for a further 420 acres in Maryland called 'Ballston'. See Sections H.3 and H.8. If Richard was born in 1639/40, he would have been aged around 19 or 20 in 1659.

14. Notwithstanding his established position in Lancaster county, no record has been found of the acquisition of land in Virginia by 'Colonel' William until around 1663, when he purchased 300 acres on Narrow Neck Creek in Lancaster county from Thomas Hobkins. The land was repatented by William Ball on 18 January 1663/64.<sup>G27</sup>

Following the acquisition of Narrow Neck, 'Colonel' William was ready to return to England and bring the rest of his family to Virginia. Subsequently, on 8 November 1665 the Lancaster County Court made an order for the grant of a certificate to William Ball for the transportation to the royal colony of himself, his son, William (23/24), his wife, 'Hannah Ball Sr.', and their daughter, 'Hannah Ball Jr.' (14/15).<sup>G28</sup>

Freeman observes: "When William Ball reached Virginia in 1657 [*sic*], he was different from most immigrants in that he was a mature man who then or thereafter 'transported' at his own expense his wife, two children and a number of servants,

free or indentured. It was not often that so large a household was brought over by a man past his youth. Equally unusual was it for so many to enter the Colony otherwise than at the cost of some resident planter or trader."<sup>G29</sup>

15. It is clear that 'Colonel' William was doing business in (or with) Virginia by 1653. As he was a merchant, perhaps operating a trading vessel, and his business involved periodic trips, necessarily extended, between England and the Chesapeake, this could explain the discrepancy in dates as to when he emigrated.

If, however, 'Colonel' William was sufficiently established in the 'Old Dominion' to be appointed one of the Justices of Lancaster county in 1659, it is surprising that he should delay moving the rest of his family, including his wife, from England for another five years, especially when his youngest son, Joseph, seems to have been sent to Virginia to join his elder brother, Richard, at the relatively tender age of eleven.

'Colonel' William may not have hastened to move his family from England or to acquire land in Virginia for a variety of reasons:

(a) 'Colonel' William's activities as a merchant engaged in trade between England and Virginia, which may have included operating a merchant ship, would have resulted in a relatively nomadic life in the early years.

(b) The acquisition of land in Maryland in 1659 and 1660 indicates that 'Colonel' William was pursuing business opportunities at that time in both Chesapeake colonies (see Section H).

(c) If 'Colonel' William was a royalist émigré, as were so many migrants from England to Virginia in the 1650s, he may have been waiting to see whether the Stuart monarchy would be restored.

(d) His wife may have been reluctant to leave England to live in the Colonies (notwithstanding that the country was under Puritan rule from 1649 until 1660) or to face the perils of the sea.

(e) Resettling his family in the Colonies may not have been one of 'Colonel' William's objectives in the early years, or else he may have been undecided between Virginia and Maryland.

(f) 'Colonel' William may have left his wife, Hannah, and second son, William, in England so that they could procure goods for him to trade in Virginia.<sup>G30</sup>

16. In his letter in 1789, Colonel James Ball Jr. says he cannot learn whether the four children of 'Colonel' William and Hannah Atherall (reputedly born between 1639/40 and 1650) were born in England or Virginia.

To date no public record of the birth or baptism of any of William and Hannah's children has been found in either England or Virginia, but it is reasonable to assume that they were born in England as:

- (a) William and Hannah are reputed to have married "in London" in 1638;
- (b) there is no suggestion that 'Colonel' William came to Virginia before 1650;<sup>G31</sup>
- (c) there are Virginia records evidencing the transportation of 'Colonel' William's four children to the Colony between c.1656 and 1665;<sup>G32</sup>
- (d) the uncertain times of the Civil War in the 1640s are characterised by a lack of surviving contemporaneous records, and many parish registers for this period were either poorly kept or destroyed.<sup>G33</sup>

### **Coat of arms**

17. The shield in the family coat of arms engraved on Colonel William's 'illuminated parchment', which features a lion passant with three stars across the top, matches both the shield of the Rev.d Robert Ball at New College, Oxford and the shield recorded by the Rev.d Richard Ball at the College of Arms in 1613, while the crest, depicting a demi-lion rampant holding a globe, matches the crest granted to Richard Ball in 1613.

18. When William Ball of Lincoln's Inn recorded his pedigree before the Heralds around 1634, he recorded his arms as four galtraps with a crest in the form of a larger galtrap (see Section E.3).

Had there been a close connection between the Balls of Berkshire and the Balls of Virginia, one would have expected to find the arms of William Ball of Lincoln's Inn, or some close approximation to them, being used by the Virginia branch of the family. Instead, the arms used by the Virginia Balls (including the crest) match the entirely different arms of the Rev.d Richard Ball, son of Lawrence Ball of Northampton.

19. The principal authoritative writers seem to have drawn on the description of the arms of the Balls of Northamptonshire in Burke's *'General Armory'*<sup>G34</sup> in describing the arms of the Balls of Virginia.<sup>G35</sup> Burke's *'American Families with British Ancestry'* in Burke's *'Landed Gentry'* (16th edition, 1939) also contains a colour illustration of the arms.<sup>G36</sup> Wright's book, however, contains a monochrome photograph of the family arms engraved on the 'illuminated parchment' which 'Colonel' William is said to have brought with him to Virginia.<sup>G37</sup>

There are a number of discrepancies between the above sources, as discussed in the endnotes, but these do not appear to be significant. It is clear, however, that at some stage the red tongue of the lion passant disappeared from the shield and the estoiles on the body of the demi-lion rampant disappeared from the crest.

The arms claimed by the Balls of Virginia include the motto *'Cœlumque tueri'* or *'Cœlum tueri'*.<sup>G38</sup> The inclusion of the motto on the 'illuminated parchment' implies that it was used by 'Colonel' William's family in England before he came to Virginia, but there is no evidence as to whether it was also used by the Northamptonshire Balls as a family motto.

20. 'Colonel' William is said to have brought the 'illuminated parchment' to Virginia in the 1650s, somewhat earlier than what Jacobus refers to as the eighteenth century practice by many American families of the 'self-assumption' of arms.<sup>G39</sup> It is debateable, however, to what extent heraldic law was enforced or else ignored during the Civil War and the interregnum (1649-1660), although the College of Arms continued to function in a fashion during the latter period.<sup>G40</sup>

It was also the case that the "great majority" of the ruling families in Virginia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, founded for the most part by the younger sons of eminent English families who migrated to the Colony between 1640 and 1669, were armigerous.<sup>G41</sup>

It therefore cannot be excluded that Colonel William may not have been entitled to bear arms and, seeking to enhance his position in the colonial social hierarchy, simply assumed the arms of another Ball family which was armigerous and subsequently commissioned a fine illustration of the arms from a heraldic artist in England.

### ***English ancestry***

21. The genealogical 'missing link' when 'Colonel' William brought his family to Virginia, as well as the confusion over his wife's maiden name, suggest that neither Colonel William nor his wife, Hannah Atherold, maintained close links with the relations they left in England.

William and Hannah's children should, however, also have been aware of their English cousins, having (Joseph excepted) spent their formative years in England. It is not known when Joseph Ball II became interested in genealogy, but he was aged 22 when his father, Colonel Joseph, died in 1711 (some 31 years after the death of Colonel William).

22. While it was pure coincidence that his kinswoman, Mrs Johnson, from whom he acquired what he believed to be a portrait of an uncle of Colonel William in 1750, was living in Wokingham, it was by design that Joseph Ball II asked the vicar of Wokingham to enquire of the Steward of the manor of Barkham whether the Balls of Barkham were ever lords of the manor (see Sections C.9 and C.10).

Joseph Ball II's enquiry suggests he felt that there was a connection between his family and the Balls of Berkshire. It may be significant that the Ball family papers 1680-1785 at the Library of Virginia include a genealogical chart dated 1748,<sup>G42</sup> which is a certified copy by the College of Arms of the pedigree recorded by William Ball of Lincoln's Inn at the Heralds' Visitation of London 1633-35, including a drawing of the arms of the Balls of Berkshire. It is quite likely that the genealogical chart was commissioned by Joseph Ball II as part of his genealogical researches whilst in London in the 1740s.<sup>G43</sup>

23. It is not known whether the entry in the Downman family Bible reciting the history of the Ball family of Barkham, which appears to have been written between 1776 and 1783, results from Joseph Ball II's genealogical researches or is derived from other sources. As on his death in 1760, Joseph Ball II's letter book and doubtless other

papers came into the hands of his son-in-law, Rawleigh Downman, who continued to use the letter book until shortly before his own death in 1781, the probability is that Joseph Ball II was the source.

As regards the erroneous reference in the history of the Ball family of Barkham in the Downman family Bible to William Ball being lord of the manor of Barkham in 1480, one possibility is that the writer of the history consulted the letter book and assumed that Joseph Ball II had received a positive response to his enquiry of the vicar of Wokingham or else misinterpreted Joseph Ball II's letter.<sup>G44</sup>

24. The conclusion that Joseph Ball II must have felt that there was a connection between the Virginia Balls and the Balls of Berkshire, as well as the acquisition of what he believed to be a portrait of one of Colonel William's uncles in 1750, is inconsistent with the statement attributed to Joseph Ball II by Hayden that he had been unable to trace his family in England.

In his *'Virginia Genealogies'*, Hayden refers to the 'recorded statement' by Joseph Ball II "made in 1745-55, that he had not yet been able to locate his family in Great Britain". In his article on *'Mary Washington'* in the Magazine of American History, Hayden says that Joseph Ball II's letter book "contains copies of his letters from 1743, in one of which he writes that he had not then been able to find any trace of his family in England".<sup>G45</sup>

There is, in fact, no such letter in Joseph Ball II's letter book, and why Hayden should be so vague in his *'Virginia Genealogies'* about the date of the 'recorded statement' is equally puzzling.

### ***Interpretation of evidence***

25. There were some 15 Ball families which were armigerous.<sup>G46</sup> It is not known to what extent Joseph Ball II was satisfied that the Balls of Barkham and Wokingham were his grandfather's forebears. Although the entitlement of the Balls of Northamptonshire to bear arms was confirmed by the College of Arms at the time of the grant of the addition of a crest in 1613, the family arms had not been recorded in any of the Visitation Books. On the other hand, the arms of Nicholas Ball, which clearly resembled the arms of the Northamptonshire Balls, had been recorded at the Visitation of London in 1633-35 (as had the arms of the Berkshire Balls), while the not wholly dissimilar arms of the Balls of Scottow had been recorded at the Visitation of Norfolk in 1589.

Since the 1748 genealogical chart of the Balls of Berkshire includes the entirely different coat of arms (featuring galtraps) of that family, Joseph Ball II must have been well aware of the discrepancy. As Walne observes, it is impossible to claim descent "from a family entitled to bear arms and to append to the descent the arms of an entirely different family, albeit of the same name. One is wrong, descent or arms."<sup>G47</sup>

26. It should be remembered that in Joseph Ball II's time, apart from personal information from family members (not necessarily the most reliable of sources),<sup>G48</sup> there were few readily accessible official records which could be consulted. The

most obvious source was parish registers, which were kept under lock and key in the 'parish chest' and could only be inspected by arrangement with the incumbent. If a family was armigerous, another source of genealogical information was the Heralds' visitations, but these ceased in 1689 following the 'Glorious Revolution'.

27. On the basis of the genealogical evidence in Section E, as well as the heraldic evidence, there is nothing to suggest any link between the Balls of Berkshire and Colonel William Ball of Millenbeck.

While the heraldic evidence instead strongly suggests a connection with the Balls of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, in the absence of any documentary evidence it cannot be excluded that there was, in fact, no family relationship and that Colonel William (or conceivably his father or another kinsman) simply assumed the arms of the armigerous Rev.d Richard Ball.