

J. Manor of Barkham

Lordship

1. There is no foundation at all for the claim that the Balls were once lords of the manor of Barkham. The Bullocks, lords of the adjacent manor of Arborfield, also became lords of the manor of Barkham from the 1330s, when Gilbert Bullock married Agnes de Neville, heiress of the manor of Barkham, until 1589, when Thomas Bullock sold the two manors to Edmond Standen, one of the Clerks of the Petty Bag of the Court of Chancery, for £4,000. The ownership of the lordships during this period by the Bullock family is well documented. The lord of the manor of Barkham in 1480 was Robert Bullock.^{J1}

All the surviving evidence indicates that the Balls of Barkham were a well-to-do yeoman family,^{J2} who during the sixteenth century lived in one of the farmsteads in the parish of Barkham, the contents of which are listed in the 1558 and 1572 probate inventories of Edward Ball, and his widow, Agnes, but whose location is unknown.^{J3}

Barkham Manor

2. The stories which have grown-up about the connection between George Washington's mother's family and Barkham also overlook the fact that in mediæval and Tudor times the manor house was located, not on the present Barkham Manor site, but on a moated site adjacent to the parish church, and was known as Barkham Court (or the farm of Barkham).^{J4} The lordships of Arborfield and Barkham were held for a time by different lines of the Berkshire Bullock family, which were later reunited, and by the 1490s the lord of both manors lived at Arborfield, as the more substantial of the two manors, and Barkham Court (or the farm of Barkham) was leased. The documents that survive and which indicate some of the tenants of Barkham Court, or the farm of Barkham, from 1444 to 1600 (some Bullock family, some non-family) do not include any Balls.^{J5}

Ditchfield unwittingly describes the mediæval manor house thus: "There is an old farmhouse near the church; it has doubtless seen better days, and has been converted into cottages. An ancient moat encircles it as if some family of distinction once lived there and wished to guard themselves and their possessions from troublesome visitors".^{J6}

3. The site of the manor of Barkham migrated from the Barkham Court site adjacent to the parish church to the present Barkham Manor site at some stage during the first part of the seventeenth century, and there is circumstantial evidence that the Standens were living there in the 1640s, although there are no surviving documentary records prior to the 1750s.^{J7}

4. Because no contemporaneous records survive, the origins of the mansion house on the present Barkham Manor site are obscure. The house itself (apart from the cellars) was re-built in both 1787 and 1801 (per advertisements to let in the *Reading Mercury*), perhaps as a result of fire.^{J8} The *Platanus Orientalis* in the grounds, which could be up to 450 years old, and the two small ornamental lakes, which possibly derive from mediæval stew (i.e. fish) ponds, may indicate the existence of a 'high

status' building on the site in Tudor times. If so, a potential candidate to have built (or re-built) a house on the site is John White, a partner in the Reading and Wokingham bellfoundries,^{J9} who retired to Barkham, where he died in 1551.^{J10} White was well-to-do by contemporary standards, leaving a personal estate of £81 15s. 7d.,^{J11} and had been Mayor of Reading (before, and after, the dissolution of Reading Abbey) in 1536 and 1542. There was no other mansion house (or capital messuage) in the parish before the late 1740s.^{J12}

Standen family/William Ball 'of Barkham'

5. The William Ball who was associated with Barkham in the 1640s and '50s was a member of the Standen family. When William Standen, lord of the manor, died intestate in 1639, his heir-at-law was a cousin called William Ball, who was the son of Joachim Ball, gentleman, and Elizabeth his wife, who was the daughter of Anthony Standen of Esher, Surrey, gentleman, who was the next brother of William Standen's father, Edmond Standen (died 1603).^{J13}

Although William Ball was heir-at-law of William Standen (died 1639), the Arborfield and Barkham estates passed under a family settlement to another kinsman, also called William Standen, who was the son of Thomas Standen, gentleman, who was the son of John Standen of Egham, Surrey, gentleman, who was the fifth brother of Edmond Standen (died 1603).^{J14}

6. This William Ball was a writer of political tracts during the 1640s and '50s. In several of these pamphlets he describes himself as 'William Ball of Barkham'.^{J15} The connection between this William Ball and Barkham was relatively limited, although he appears to have lived in the mansion house on the present Barkham Manor site (when not in London) around 1645-1652.^{J16}

He probably described himself as 'William Ball of Barkham' to avoid being confused with William Ball of Lincoln's Inn (see Section E), who was a more prominent supporter of the Parliamentary cause. In fact, William Ball of Lincoln's Inn succeeded in being elected to the Long Parliament as MP for Abingdon in 1646 after unsuccessfully standing for one of the Reading Borough seats.^{J17}

Curiously, in a 1639 feet of fines (a contrived court action for the transfer of land) concerning the manors of Arborfield and Barkham,^{J18} and in his first surviving pamphlet published in 1641,^{J19} he describes himself as 'William Ball, alias Bennet[t]'. This suggests that his father, Joachim Ball, predeceased his mother who subsequently remarried, becoming a Mrs Bennett.