

# Archive News

August 2021

NEWSLETTER OF THE IBVM: INSTITUTE & IRISH PROVINCE ARCHIVES

## 2021 The Bicentenary of Frances Teresa Ball's return to Ireland

In 2021 the Institute globally marks the 200th anniversary of the return of Frances Teresa Ball to Dublin and the establishment of a new branch of Mary Ward's Institute.

Throughout this significant year, we in the Institute Archives hope to mark this bi-centenary with a series of newsletters, online exhibition to explore the life of M. Teresa Ball, her companions and the history of this branch of Mary Ward's Institute.



In this special issue of *Archive News*, we celebrate the Ball family, the parents and siblings of Frances Teresa Ball. The family home, in Eccles Street, Dublin was where Frances Ball experienced and witnessed true Christian charity and Catholic social action that endured throughout her life and that of all her siblings. This newsletter and much of its contents were in a previous issue of *Archive News* in 2014.

It seemed appropriate in this special issue to re-focus once again on the Ball family.

The little miniature portrait we have of Frances Ball was probably painted during her visit to her sister Cecilia, M. Regis Ball, Ursuline Convent, Cork in 1814. Frederick Buck, a famous portrait painter living in Cork, was the subject of an article in *Irish Art Review* a few years ago and the portrait of Frances would sit perfectly beside the samples of his work reproduced in the article.

This portrait is only one of two portraits which we can definitely say were painted during M. Teresa Ball's lifetime and are the most authentic. The second is a portrait by Haverty RHA, which was commissioned in 1834, and currently hangs in Loreto College, Stephen's Green, Dublin.



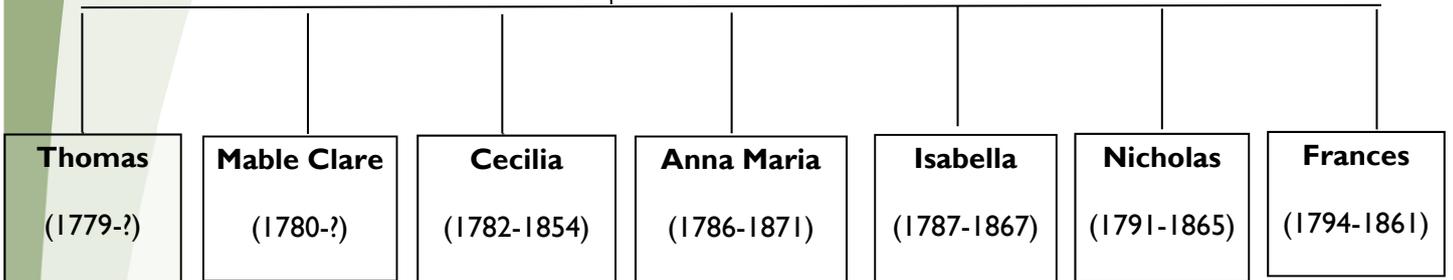
# Ball Family Tree



**John Ball**  
(c.1728-1804)

m.1776

**Mable Clare Bennett**  
(?-1831)



## First Marriage

In 1776 John Ball married a Miss Byrne of Saggart, Dublin and together they had one child, a son, John Ball born in 1767. After the death of his first wife, John ball married Mabel Clare Bennett. His first son, John Ball (b. 1767) became a successful businessman with operations in Cadiz, Spain.



## 2014 Discovery

In 2014, whilst researching the Ball family, Karen de Lacey identified two siblings of Teresa Ball who were heretofore unknown. John Ball and Mable Clare Bennett married in 1776 and although it was commonly believed that their first child was their daughter Cecilia, baptismal records for SS Michael & John in Dublin indicate that their first child was a son, Thomas, born in 1779. A daughter, Mable Clare, followed in 1780. As these children are never mentioned in any of the writings about the Ball family it seems likely that they died in infancy. Unfortunately, civil registration did not begin until 1864 and Catholic burial records for the period are scarce. As a result, to date we have been unable to uncover their stories.

# Mother Mary Regis (Cecilia) Ball

## Eldest child of John and Mabel Ball

Frances Ball was a pupil in the Bar Convent when her beloved father died in 1804 and on hearing of her sister Cecilia's decision to enter the Ursuline Convent in Cork in 1805 Frances knew that home would never be the same again.

Cecilia Ball had been educated in the Ursuline Convent, Cork and entered there on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1805. In November 1809, Mrs. Ball, Isabella, Anna Maria and Frances travelled to Cork for Cecilia's Profession. They travelled by stagecoach, lined with copper, and were assured it was completely bullet-proof. They were escorted by two dragoons of armed guards. Apart from the journey to York, Frances had never been outside of Dublin before.

The records of the Ursuline Convent tell that shortly after her Profession Cecilia fell ill, and for the rest of her life had to endure great physical suffering which amounted to 'a long, slow martyrdom, borne with patient submission and perfect abandonment to the divine will.' In spite of her delicacy she filled many posts of importance in the convent, being Superior for twelve years, as well as Mistress General, Assistant Mistress of Novices, Zelatrice and Assistant to the Superior at different times.



Ursuline Convent Cork, accessed at <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/commercial-property/ursuline-convent-conversion-in-cork-for-3-75m-1.2133707>, 08/06/2020

The letter which follows from Cecilia, sympathizing with M. Teresa Ball on the death of Dr. Murray, is kept in the IBVM Institute Archives, and offers additional insight into the close bonds between the Ball siblings.

*“Seek First the Kingdom of God and his Justice and all else will be given to you”.*

Blackrock

March, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1852

My very dear Teresa,

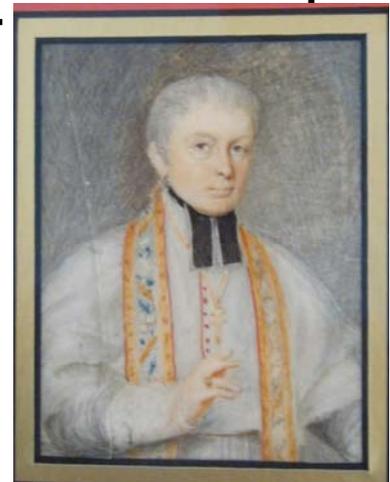
I should have ere now expressed my feeling and sympathy for the trial sent you by an all wise Providence in translating your saintly prelate and sincere friend to the realms of celestial bliss where he will be much more powerful by his intercession than when on earth. Happily for himself his days were full and his crown completed but he has left a void which can scarcely be filled up.

The election for his successor appears to me a subject for much prayer in these awful times. Oh, how unsearchable are the ways of God. Anna Maria mentioned your illness but not the complaint. I trust you are now able to give me a line, with an account of yourself. I feel much also for Mother Aikenhead. As to dear Anna Maria, she is indeed the strong woman of the Gospel and proves by her example the power of religion and its influence on all occasions, when required. May we all be prepared for our summons to our happy country. I have great need of prayers to obtain patience and resignation to the Divine will, my health is not improving. At the age of 70 it would be folly to expect or wish it. I rely on your spiritual children to ask for me a happy death and final perseverance in God's union. I am sure of your own petitions – excuse my writing in Lent, but this was on a particular occasion – mention how M. Aloysia McCarthy is, as our dear Rev. Mother will be anxious to know. Sr. Ignatius and Xavaria wish affectionate love and to assure you of their mutual sympathy and feeling on the late melancholy event, likewise your friends in our community.

Believe me dearest Teresa,  
Your fondly attached Sister,

*M.F. Regis*

Portrait of Dr Daniel Murray, held by the  
IBVM Institute Archives



# Obituary Notice for M. Mary Regis

*October 3rd, 1854*

The sad and to some extent unexpected intelligence of this morning was that our dear and revered Mother M. Regis had terminated her saintly life during the night, exchanging the darkness of earth for the bright day that knows no decline, and all the ills of the present time for the joy that never ends and the peach that is never exhausted.

Startling and afflicting as the news of her departure was to us, to her the summons came not unexpectedly; for her whole existence had been one continued preparation for it, and all the consolations appointed by the Church for the Christian's last hour were secured to her at her own earnest request even before their immediate necessity had become apparent to others.

Combining with great natural prudence and soundness of judgement, the wisdom and moderation derived from lengthened experience, this truly perfect religious was a most valuable and valued resource as an adviser, not only in ordinary details, but also in particular emergencies, and while her holy exemplary life inspired universal respect, her great kindness of heart, gentleness, consideration and amiability attracted the esteem and love of all who had the happiness to know her intimately.

She filled the post of 2<sup>nd</sup> Mistress of Novices for some time; that of Assistant for three years; of Zelatrice for 6 years; of Superioress for twelve years, and of Mistress General for twelve years also; and that, notwithstanding severe and almost uninterrupted corporal sufferings which, commencing shortly after her Profession and generally increasing with the years, made of her religious life a long abandonment to the Divine Will, which, while it sanctified her own soul and edified all around her, has no doubt ensured her in Heaven the crown of glory promised to all who wear the crown of tribulation resignedly on earth.

**The gravestone of Cecilia Ball (Mother Mary Regis) in the Ursuline Cemetery in Cork.**



## Anna Maria O'Brien née Ball

Frances' older sister, Anna Maria completed her education in the Bar Convent, York in 1803. Together with her sister, Isabella, she returned to Dublin to take her place in the society open to them. Due to their family engagement with social and charitable works, part of their time would, undoubtedly, have been given to the underprivileged.

On 12 November, 1805 Anna Maria married John O'Brien, the younger son of Mr. Denis O'Brien who resided at 33 Rutland Square, now Parnell Square, Dublin. Denis O'Brien was involved in the foreign import trade under the name of T. Meade & Co. Their premises were at 23 Merchant's Quay and they also had extensive warehouses in Cook St. Anna Marie and John O'Brien lived at what is now 22 Mountjoy Square.

The Ball family made a contribution to the period 1760—1860 which is still in evidence today, not only in Ireland but far beyond our shores. In the later part of the 18th Century, Catholic Emancipation was still in the future. The Catholic community in Dublin was largely engaged in trade, since most, if not all, of the professions were closed to it. At the time a number of Catholic merchant families were very well-to-do, including the Balls, O'Briens and Sherlocks.

Anna Maria and Isabella Ball went to school in the Bar Convent, York, England. In 1798 a Rebellion had taken place in Ireland, there was great unrest in the country. It was considered too dangerous to travel to Cork to the Ursuline Convent where Cecilia, the oldest of the family, had been educated. Cecilia spent some time at home, taking part in the charitable works her mother was engaged in. She longed to enter the Ursuline Order but had to wait until she was considered old enough to make such commitment. At last the day came and a tearful parting took place as her father accompanied her to Cork. In the autumn of 1809 Anna Maria and Frances travelled to Cork to her Profession in the Ursuline Convent.

In Cork, Anna Maria met a young lady with very similar interests to her own. Born in 1787, Mary Aikenhead, felt the strong call to devote her life to those less fortunate than herself. She wished to be vowed to God in an Order where she could be of active and practical use to them.

Anna Maria O'Brien invited her to Dublin and introduced her to Dr. Murray, Bishop in Dublin. Anna Maria was particularly anxious to save young girls "from ignorance and danger". To this end she opened a house in Ash Street, near the Coombe and, supported by other women, carried on this work. Mary Aikenhead visited this house with her. Mary Aikenhead wanted to work with the needy and Anna Maria suggested that she set up an Order herself as there was no Order to do this work at the time. Dr. Murray had long hoped to set up a Congregation of Sisters of Charity. He considered Mary Aikenhead a possible candidate for this purpose.



Anna Maria O'Brien, became one of 'the most famous lay Catholic philanthropist[s] of the early nineteenth century.'

<sup>1</sup> 'Laity and Clergy in the Catholic Renewal of Dublin c. 1750 – 1830', by Cormac Stephen Begadon, Ph D thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2009.

In 1812 Mary Aikenhead and Alicia Walsh set out for the Bar Convent, York to prepare to found a new congregation, the Sisters of Charity, in Dublin. From the early days of the new congregation Anna Maria was ever a devoted and powerful ally. She often put on the poked bonnet and hood and accompanied the Sisters on visits to the sick and poor. She took the Sisters, in her carriage, to distant places which they could not have reached unaided. Generous donations from the O'Brien family were of tremendous help to the struggling religious. Establishing a new foundation, with no other example to follow, was really hard. John O'Brien's sister, Maria O'Brien insisted Mary Aikenhead should go to her house in Rahan for a rest. She travelled to Rahan by covered barge from Portobello Bridge.

After her return to Dublin she was persuaded to take over the care of the house that Anna Maria had opened for young women. That ministry had been transferred from the Coombe to Stanhope St by this time. Because of the ground available there M. Aikenhead decided to build a convent and novitiate there and the Sisters moved from North William St. to the new convent in 1819.

From Stanhope Street, Mrs. O'Brien and the Sisters visited the hospital in Jervis Street and the Kilmainham Jail. The care of the Parochial Schools in King's Inns Street were given over to the Sisters and Mrs. O'Brien appointed as Manager. This was most unusual in those times. Anna Maria took a keen interest in everything to do with the schools. She purchased two pianos and a harmonium for it. She took food to poor children there. She continued to visit the school twice a week until she was too feeble to do so.

Anna Maria had the sadness of seeing her siblings die before her. She continued her charitable work until two years before her death on 28 March, 1871. She died at her house in Mountjoy Square aged 86. Her death brought to an end the last of John Ball's family, a family which made a magnificent contribution to education of the rich and poor alike, to the care and health of the under-privileged and to justice.

Charitable works and living the Christian life in its fullest sense were central to the Ball and O'Brien family traditions. They also used their well earned money and gifts of education in their life-long help and assistance to others.



## Isabella Sherlock née Ball

Isabella Ball was the fifth child and fourth daughter born to John Ball and Mabel Clare Bennett. She was born in 1787, and in approximately 1808 married Thomas Sherlock, a wealthy Dublin merchant. She died in 1867, and her son John Sherlock inherited control of the large Rahan estate of his maternal aunt, Anna Maria O'Brien.

The collection of M. Teresa Ball IBVM papers, include a small collection of letters from her sister Isabella, who wrote often from Rome with news on petitions and rescripts presented on behalf of M. Teresa Ball, and her efforts at securing the relics of two martyrs for chapels in new foundations. Also present is a travel diary of Isabella Sherlock from her travels to Rome March 1846 – July 1847. References to Isabella Sherlock in letters received from the community in the Bar Convent, York indicate that like her sisters, Isabella maintained close links with her alma-mater.

Transcribed below is a letter from Isabella Sherlock to M. Teresa Ball in February 1850.

*TB/COR/7/5*

24 Via Deidue Macelle,  
Roma  
Italia

12<sup>th</sup> Feby 1850

My dear Sister,

I hasten to reply by this days post to your welcome letter which came to hand in the afternoon of yesterday. The pleasing intelligence of my family and relations being in the enjoyment of good health always affords me infinite satisfaction. With regard to dear Jane<sup>1</sup>, notwithstanding the great change always attending the care of a young person, still I am willing to do anything in the present circumstances to promote her good, provided I am not held responsible either for her making up a match for herself without any knowledge or becoming a nun, in either case I should consider myself bound to communicate her intentions to her parents without delay. I found her achievements amiable and can never forget her attention to me when afflicted. I hope to see her settled in the world to her advantage. She has qualities to fit her for a wife and for a mother if she have the good fortune to meet with a partner worthy of her.

We arrived at the last day of carnival without, as far as regards us, meeting with anything unpleasant. I send by this first the Roman paper of yesterday which gives a true account of the proceedings on the Corso last Saturday. I have directed it to His Grace. He will kindly let you know the contents as things are so exaggerated that the half in general is quite enough to believe.

The French Ambassador who is likewise the Commander in Chief has heretofore used such clemency with the revolutionary party that not one execution has taken place, is now determined to act with promptitude and severity. On



next Thursday two or three are to be shot on the Piazza del Popolo for stabbing some French soldier.

Upwards of a hundred have been arrested within the last week. This state of things will keep His Holiness some time longer absent.<sup>2</sup> It wouldn't surprise me if Doctor Cullen goes to Naples for his consecration. There is no certainty of Cardinal Frasoni coming to Rome just now. He was expected to perform the ceremony.

Things might go on very comfortably here if the thousand soldiers with nothing in their pockets could be got rid of. The Triumvirate of Cardinals are labouring hard to bring things to bear, there has been a great turn out of those employed under the Republic which naturally causes ill will and discontent, a known force for some time and severe laws will be absolutely necessary.



I hope by this you have received a letter and your enclosure partly directed by Dr. Oliffe from Malta. It came to the Irish College I believe by hand. I forwarded it without delay, by post four or five days ago. What a wonderful constitution His Grace has, enjoying such health notwithstanding the severity of the late weather. Will you present him our untied respects. Dr. Hines has been here some time expecting to have some business done at the Propaganda. He is Bishop of whatever place in the West Indies Mr Briten, father to Mrs. Cruise, resides.

I am delighted to hear of David's making some way in his profession notwithstanding the hard times. Every letter, nearly, lavishes praises on his wife which is certainly very satisfactory.<sup>3</sup> I had a letter last week from her. She expects to be confined this month. I think Providence is favouring you in a particular manner also, so very difficult others find it to get on both in and out of the world.

I heard from Tim Sherlock a few days ago notwithstanding the intense cold of Florence, he is very stout and rides out nearly every day. He was at Jane Oliviere's wedding and thinks the General a good man.

Mary Ann and John<sup>3</sup> join me in affectionate love to you and fond remembrance to all our friends, excuse this hasty scrawl and believe me your affectionate sister,

*Isabella Sherlock*

<sup>1</sup> Jane was the daughter of their brother Nicholas.

<sup>2</sup> During the Italian Revolutions, Pope IX had refused to go to war with Catholic Austria and as a result had to flee Rome in 1848. He would return two months after this letter in April 1850.

<sup>3</sup> David, Mary Ann and John were Isabella's children.



Copy of Isabella Sherlock's (née Ball) letter to her sister M. Teresa Ball transcribed above. It was sent to Rathfarnham from Rome in 1850. The original is in a very delicate condition on superfine paper.

## Nicholas Ball (1791—1865)

Letters in the Institute Archives indicate the warm, close and loving relationship that Teresa Ball enjoyed with her brother Nicholas and his children, a closeness which she maintained with many of her nieces and nephews.

Nicholas Ball was born in 1791, the sole surviving son of John Ball and Mable Clare Bennett. He was only 13 when his father died. Educated at the Jesuit Stonyhurst College in England, he left in 1808 and travelled to York to bring his sister Frances home to Ireland. She was leaving the Bar Convent early on account of her Mother being left alone after the marriages of her sisters Anna Maria and Isabella. Nicholas is said to have directed Frances' studies after her return to Dublin. He had entered Trinity College Dublin in 1808 aged 17 as a Socius Comitatus. Known as Gentleman Commoners and generally the children of the wealthy, a Socius Comitatus paid double fees and in return received several privileges, including finishing the degree in three years instead of four. Nicholas received his BA in 1812 and was soon after called to the Irish Bar.

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1817, the *Freeman's Journal* announced his marriage— "Yesterday, Nicholas Ball Esq of Eccles St, Barrister at Law, to Jane, second daughter of the late Thomas Sherlock Esq of Butlerstown, Co. Waterford." Nicholas and Jane had eight children, all of whom were baptised at the newly opened Pro-Cathedral on Marlborough Street. He is frequently mentioned in the newspapers of the time as a donor to various charitable institutions and projects. He appears to have been close to his sister Frances—there are a number of letters in the archive addressed to 'Fanny', giving her advice on various matters, mostly legal.



Bust of Judge Nicholas Ball

He achieved enormous success in his legal career. He became a bencher of Kings Inns in 1835 and was nominated King's Serjeant in 1836 before being appointed Attorney-General in 1838, only the second Catholic to hold this office since the reign of James II. In the same year he was elected MP for Clonmel, a post in which he only served a year, supposedly owing to his distaste for politics. In 1839 he became a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, a senior court of law at the time. He remained in this position until his death in 1865.

The book *Joyful Mother of Children* gives an indication of the character of Nicholas—"Nicholas Ball's social gifts, his geniality, pleasant wit and brilliance as a conversationalist made him very popular. As Judge his witty sallies enlivened the hearing of many a tedious case." An article which appeared in *The Irish Times* not long after his death agrees with this assessment of Nicholas – "Everything with him had its use, even nothings! His desire was to please and be pleased. He was like an indiarubber ball, and found amusement and topics of conversation at every turn."

He died in 1865. His funeral was widely reported in the Irish newspapers – his three remaining sons, Alexander, John and the Rev. Anthony all attended, as did his nephew David Sherlock and brother-in-law Mr. John O'Brien, husband of his sister Anna Maria. He was described as an “amiable and accomplished gentleman, an upright judge and a worthy citizen”. It was noted that “men of the highest rank and of all shades of political and religious belief came to do honour to the departed, who, during a long, active, and useful life, won the deep and sincere respect of all who knew him.”

Nicholas Ball and Jane Sherlock's eight children led varied lives which are detailed in *Archive News*, June 2014.

## Mary Isabella Ball (1820 – 1867)

Mary Isabella Ball was born in Dublin in 1820, the third child and second daughter of Nicholas Ball and Jane Sherlock. She joined her aunt in Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham as a pupil for some years, but being of delicate health, it was felt that the 'air' in the Bar Convent in York would be more suitable. Like her aunts, she travelled to York to complete her education.

Mary was very delicate and was lame following an injury to her knee. Having completed her education in York, she returned to Dublin. However, the city's climate disagreed with her so much that her father asked the Bar Convent nuns to keep her until he could bring her to Paris to an eminent surgeon. At the Bar Convent, in 1844, on the Feast of the Holy Name, a relic of the Jesuit martyr Fr. Arrowsmith was applied to the injured leg, which was immediately cured.

Mary Ball, having long desired to enter the Bar Convent, was admitted to the novitiate in York and was known in religion as Sister Mary Alphonsa. She served as Consultress and Mistress of Novices. Mother Angela Browne described her as 'the perfect religious'. She was the first member and later Superior of a foundation in Scarborough before she contracted tuberculosis and died on 6 March 1867 at the age of 47. She is buried in the Bar Convent cemetery in York.

The Institute Archives contain a file of carefully preserved letters from M. Alphonsa Ball, York to her aunt, M. Teresa Ball, indicating a close and loving relationship not just between aunt and niece, but also between the York community and M. Teresa Ball.



The Bar Convent, York