



7.0 The Main Sites of Activity During the Rising.

7.12 Ashbourne, County Meath

Commandant Thomas Ashe and Volunteers of the small 5th Battalion of the Dublin Brigade were active in north county Dublin throughout the Easter Rising. Partly on the advice of his second in command Richard Mulcahy, a member of a Dublin city battalion who had only just transferred to Ashe's battalion, Ashe adopted guerilla tactics, damaging railway lines and capturing some small Royal Irish Constabulary barracks, the aim being to hamper enemy movements, take pressure off their comrades in Dublin city, and procure arms. On Tuesday of Easter Week, Ashe dispatched twenty men to the GPO, some of whom were sent on to the Mendicity Institution.

On the Friday morning, Ashe's force of fifty Volunteers surrounded the RIC barracks at Ashbourne across the border in Co. Meath. The garrison of sixteen men and a district inspector was about to surrender when a force of approximately sixty RIC men and two senior officers arrived on the scene in motor cars. Following a lengthy engagement along the dykes, drains and ditches, the Volunteers forced the RIC, both those in the open and those in the barracks, to surrender. Joseph Lawless, a Volunteer who participated in the action, has given the casualties as two Volunteers killed and five wounded and eight RIC men killed and fifteen wounded. From the Volunteers point of view this was by far the most successful action of the Rising, the element of surprise probably being a major factor. Ashbourne and the guerilla warfare tactics adopted by Ashe and Mulcahy provided a role model for those involved in the War of Independence in the following years.

Following the general surrender Ashe was tried by court-martial and sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.

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Commandant Thomas Ashe (1885-1917). Born in Lispole, Co. Kerry, he qualified as a teacher and was principal of Corduff national school, Lusk, Co. Dublin. He was a member of the IRB and the Irish Volunteers, becoming brigade commandant shortly before the Rising. He died on 25 Sept. 1917 as a result of forcible feeding while he was on hunger strike when serving a sentence for sedition. (Keogh 39).

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Thomas Ashe was an active member of the Gaelic League and an accomplished performer on the traditional war pipes. He was said to be a tall and commanding presence and a charismatic public speaker. (Keogh 3).

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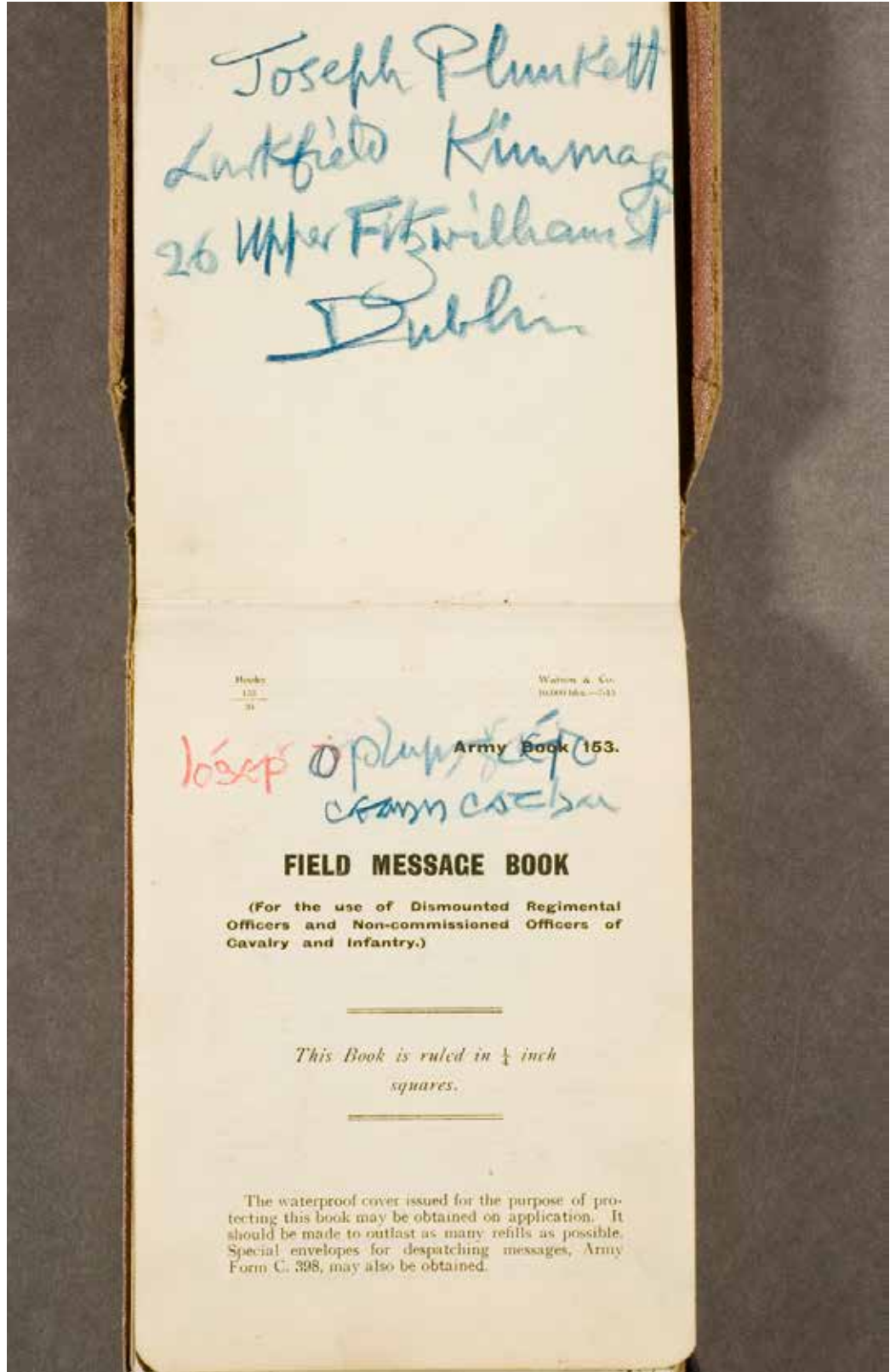


Richard Mulcahy (1886-1971); born in Co. Waterford, he worked as an engineer with the Post Office. He was a member of the Gaelic League, the IRB and the Irish Volunteers.

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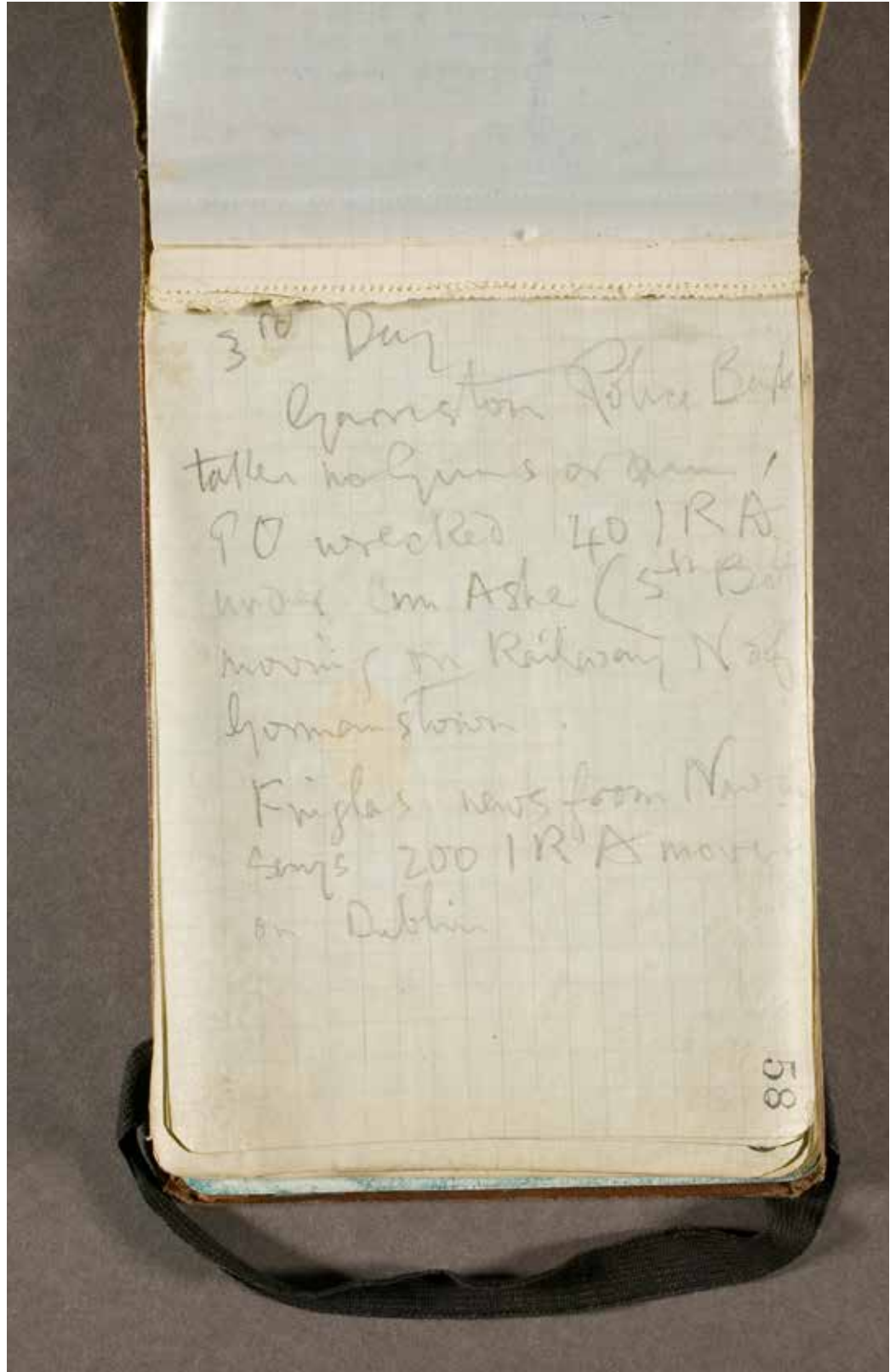


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Pages from Joseph Plunkett's field notebook relating to the action at Ashbourne. (Ms. 4,700).

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Joseph Plunkett: Field Message Book

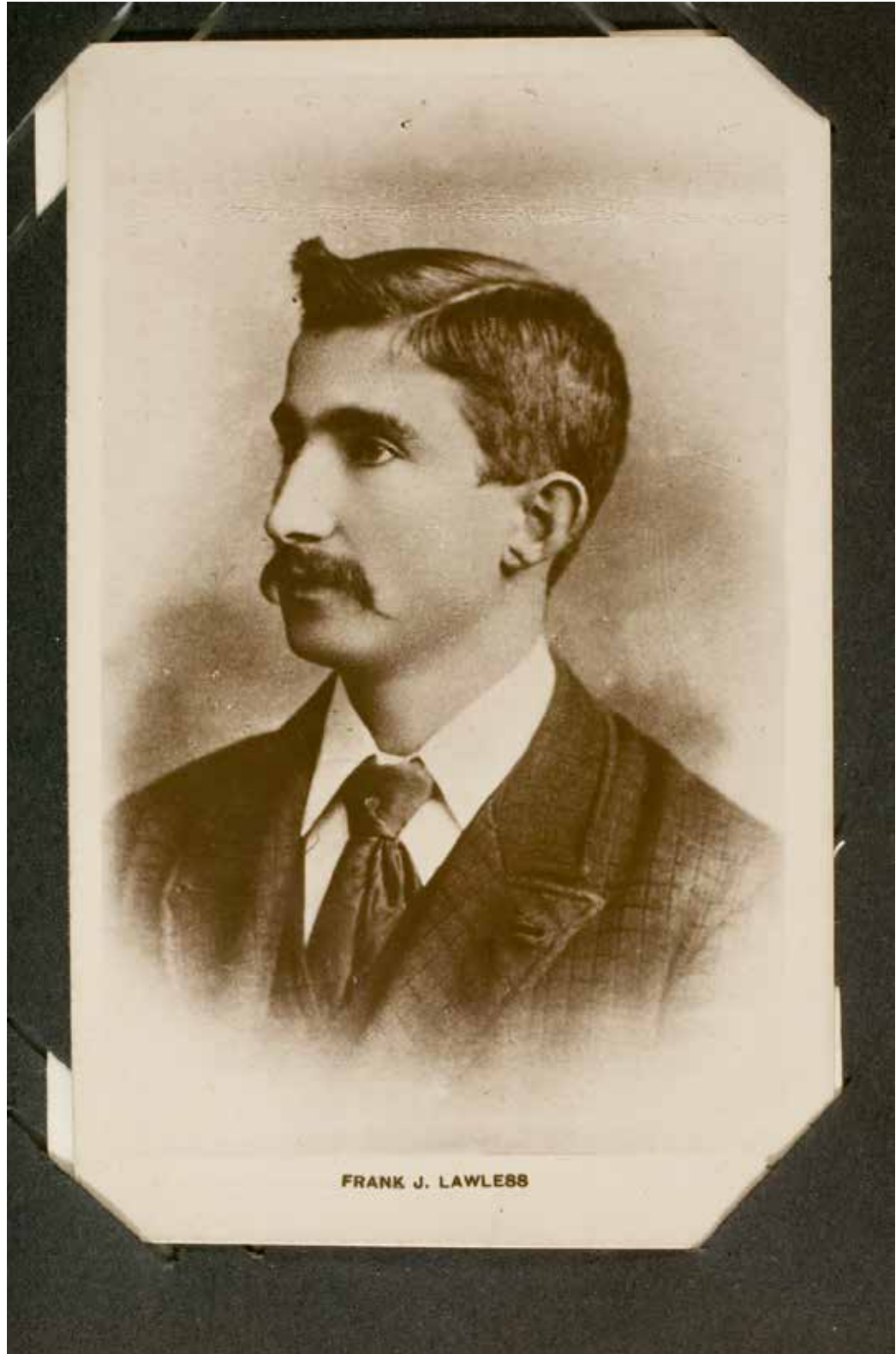
3rd Day

Garriston [Garristown] Police Barracks
taken. No guns or arms!

Post Office wrecked. 40 IRA
under Commandant Ashe (5th Brigade [i.e. Battalion])
moving on railway north of Gormanstown.

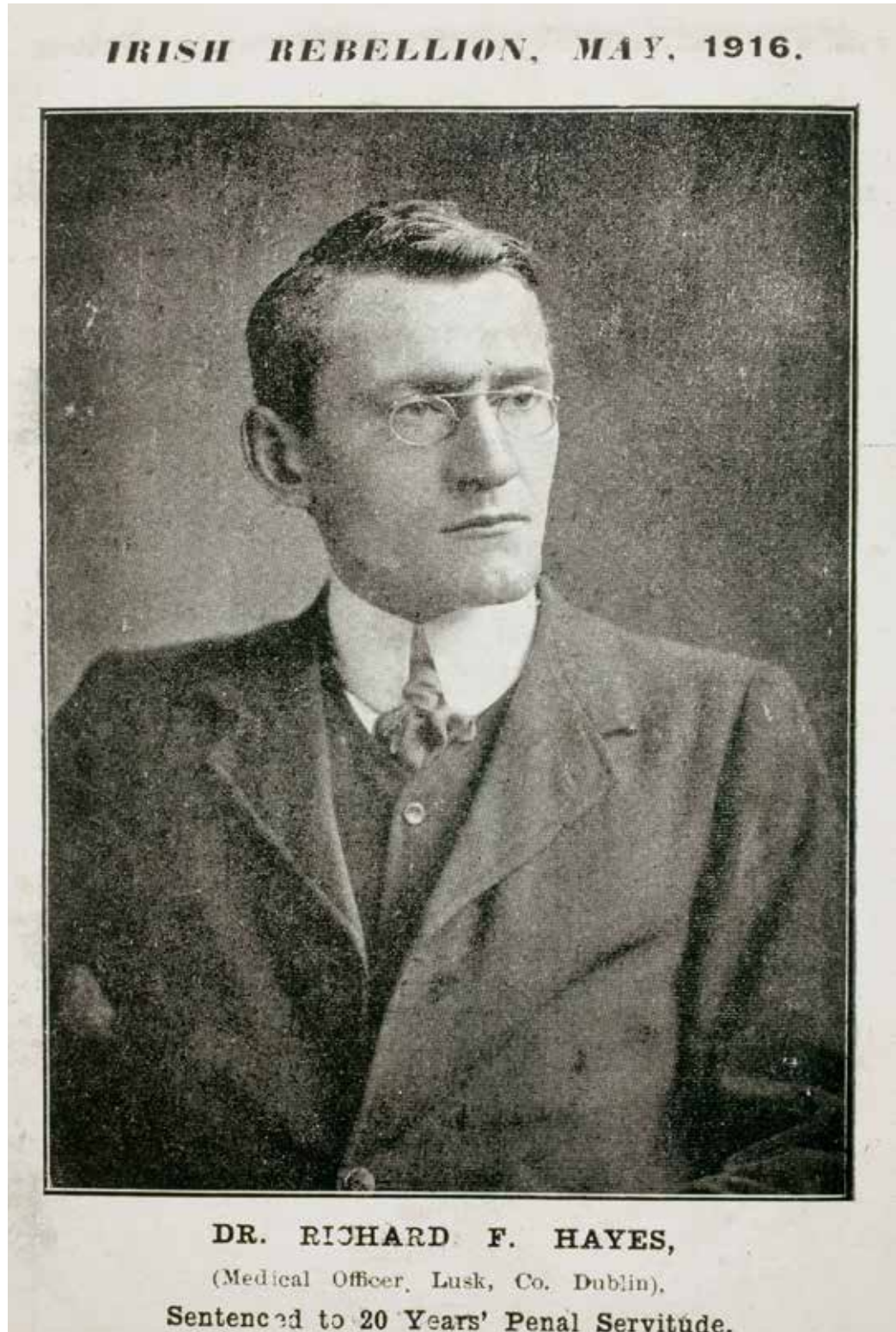
Finglas. News from N[?avan]
says 200 IRA moving on Dublin.

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Frank J. Lawless, quartermaster of the 5th Dublin Brigade, was involved in the action at Ashbourne in which his son Joseph also took part. (Album 73).

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A commemorative postcard for Dr Richard F. Hayes, a native of Bruree, Co. Limerick and a boyhood friend of Eamon de Valera. He was afterwards author of Biographical Dictionary of Irishmen in France (1940) and other books. (Album 113).

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An edition of Thomas Ashe's moving poem, 'Let me carry your cross for Ireland, Lord'.
(ILB 300, P. 11/25).

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The Ashe Memorial Hall, Tralee, Co. Kerry. It now houses Kerry County Museum. (Valentine 3065).