

# Fingal and the Fight for Irish Freedom



Thomas Ashe



Richard Coleman



Frank Lawless



Charlie Weston



James Lawless



Dr. Hayes

*“North County Dublin...is quiet.”*

RIC Inspector's Report



In early 1916 North County Dublin was described as “quiet” by the RIC County Inspector. The Fingal Brigade/5th Battalion numbered no more than 100 Volunteers made up of small companies in Lusk, Skerries, St. Margaret's, Swords, and Turvey.

- Brigade Commandant Thomas Ashe
- Battalion Adjutant Dr. Richard Hayes
- Quartermaster Frank Lawless

#### COMPANY CAPTAINS

Swords: Richard Coleman  
Lusk: Edward Rooney  
Skerries: Joseph Thornton  
St. Margaret's: James V. Lawless

Donabate Volunteers were loosely attached to Swords Company.

There was also an active unit of the Irish Citizen Army based in Baldoyle. This consisted of about 15 members. Both the Volunteers and the Baldoyle unit were very well-trained and drilled by Irish ex-British Army soldiers.

There were a number of Fingallians from all parts of the County in various city Battalions of the Dublin Brigade.

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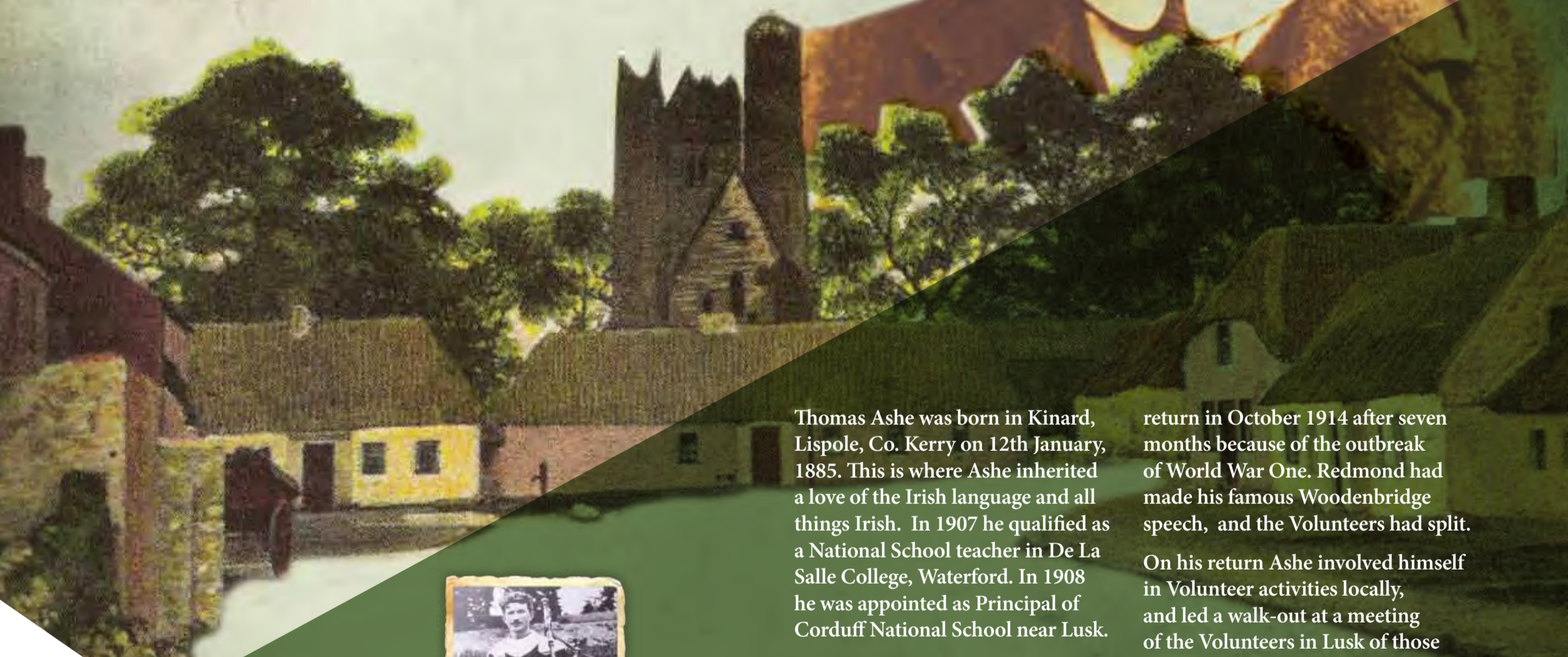




# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall

*“They are not showy or demonstrative people in Fingal, but they are responsive to a leader they can take to. They took to Tom Ashe.”*

William O’Brien, Donabate



Thomas Ashe in full piper's uniform

Thomas Ashe was born in Kinard, Lispole, Co. Kerry on 12th January, 1885. This is where Ashe inherited a love of the Irish language and all things Irish. In 1907 he qualified as a National School teacher in De La Salle College, Waterford. In 1908 he was appointed as Principal of Corduff National School near Lusk.

Ashe became friendly with James Connolly and Sean O’Casey as they shared strong opinions on injustice. He became a member of the I.R.B. He joined the Gaelic League and was appointed to their governing body, the Coiste Gnotha. Some of his colleagues there were Seán T. O’Ceallaigh, Sean MacDiarmada, Eamonn Ceannt, The O’Rahilly, and Eoin MacNeill.

In January 1914 Ashe took a break from teaching and travelled to the United States on a fund-raising trip for the Gaelic League. He had to

return in October 1914 after seven months because of the outbreak of World War One. Redmond had made his famous Woodenbridge speech, and the Volunteers had split.

On his return Ashe involved himself in Volunteer activities locally, and led a walk-out at a meeting of the Volunteers in Lusk of those not taking up Redmond’s call. He regularly trained the men of the new Fingal Brigade (5th Battalion) and by 1916 was elected Commandant of this unit.

These Volunteers, many from farming backgrounds, a few “crackshots” with a rifle, familiarised themselves with the rural landscape of Fingal, and took part in manoeuvres and fake battles against other Dublin battalions, such as the ‘Battle of Broadmeadows’. Ashe had mapped the whole area and had plans and routes ready.

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# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall

*“Strike at one o’clock today.”*

P.H. Pearse

## EASTER SUNDAY

120 5th Battalion members turn out at 4.30 p.m. at Rathbeale Cross, Swords. Joseph Lawless goes to Connolly with message from Ashe and returns with orders that all is off but be ready. All volunteers return home.

## EASTER MONDAY

Orders from Patrick Pearse reach Ashe “strike at one o’clock today”. Ashe orders second mobilisation at Knocksedan Bridge, Swords. Around 75 men turn up.



Paddy Doyle and Dan Brophy



Johnny Devine



Dick McArdle

Those that stayed at Ashbourne included:

Commandant Thomas Ashe & Dr Richard Hayes medical officer.

Frank Lawless, Quarter-Master.

Jim Lawless & Edward Rooney, Captains.

Richard Aungier, Paddy Brogan, James Connor, John Crenigan, John Devine, Francis Daly, Paddy Doyle, Richard & Thomas Duke, Walter Farrelly, Jack Gowan, James & Matthew Kelly, Edmund Kent, Colm & Joseph Lawless, Bennie, John & Michael McAllister, John McCann, James & Patrick McArdle, Éamonn Murphy, Joe Norton, Christy Nugent, James O’Connor, Jack Rafferty, Thomas Rafferty, Thomas Reilly, James Rooney, Paddy Sheehan, Ned Stafford, (George Stafford, lookout), Joe Taylor, Nicholas Teeling, Joe Thornton Bartle and Charlie Weston.

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Black Raven Pipe Band  
member John Rooney

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# Fingal and the Fight for Irish Freedom

*“Will you surrender? By God if you don't we will give you a dog's death.”*



James Marks



Peter Wilson

On Tuesday Ashe is requested to send 40 men into the city to bolster the garrisons there. It was decided to send 20 under Capt. Richard Coleman. These included:

Dan Brophy	John McNally, Swords
Patrick Cadell, Lusk	James Marks, Swords
John Clarke, Lusk	William Meehan, Lusk
James Crenegan, Roganstown	Joe Norton
John (Jack) Crenigan, Swords	Thomas Peppard, Lusk
William Doyle, Swords	James Wilson
Jack Hynes, Lusk	Peter Wilson
Jack Kelly, Swords	William (Cooty/Beck) Wilson
Patrick Kelly, Swords	Peter Wilson
Richard Kelly, Corduff	

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# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall



Despite the absence of any formal organisation of Cumann na mBan in north County Dublin in 1916, a small number of women were involved in the events of Easter Week.

This small group was overwhelmingly comprised of the female relatives of local Volunteers. These included:

- Evelyn and Kathleen Lawless, daughters of IRB leader Frank Lawless from Swords
- Thomasina and Mary Julia Weston, sisters of Charlie and Bartle Weston from Lusk.

The Misses Coleman, Ryan, Duff and Brangan from Swords, Misses Duke and McDonnell (St.Margarets), Josie Ennis (Naul), Maggie McNally (Lusk) and Monica (Dot) Fleming were also eager to play their part.

*“Volunteers....except for the actual carrying of arms.”*

Kathleen McAllister & Mary Julia Weston

The women worked closely with the Volunteers, mobilising the men and updating them on camp locations, moving equipment and supplies, delivering messages and scouting the Fingal area, observing military and RIC movement and activity.

They were also involved in providing food supplies and cooking for the Volunteers. Although often basic and mundane, the women's tasks were carried out under circumstances which were far from normal and were ultimately essential for the successful outcome of the campaign.

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# Fingal and the Fight for Irish Freedom

*"....until the people came home from Fairyhouse I knew nothing whatever."*

Mary (Molly) Adrien was born into an affluent professional family in Co. Meath, 21 September 1873. Her grandfather Dr. Adrian attended Lord Edward Fitzgerald in Newgate Prison and her father Doctor Edward William Adrian was the Medical Officer attached to the Dispensary in Balbriggan. Following in their distinguished footsteps, Molly was the first lady to be elected to the Balrothery Board of Guardians in July 1914.



**The Lady Guardian.**  
At this stage the lady guardian for Oldtown, Miss Adrian, entered the board-room and was loudly cheered. The Chairman said that a few moments ago he had to thank them for the honour they had conferred on himself, but he now thought it a greater honour as a great many illustrious men had sat in that chair, and it had been reserved for him to have the pleasure of presiding and introducing their first lady guardian. He had always thought that there was a want on the board by reason of no lady guardian being present, and he congratulated Miss Adrian as being the one to fill that vacancy, and he regretted that other districts had not taken the example of Oldtown. Miss Adrian was no stranger among them. She was a member of one of the oldest and most respected families who had long and honoured associations with the board, her father and grand grandfather being valued officers of the board. He had great pleasure on behalf of himself and the board in extending a hearty welcome to Miss Adrian. Mr Walsh seconded. Mr Matthews said that anywhere in Ireland where lady guardians had been elected they had proved a great success.

As a staunch nationalist Molly joined the Ard Craobh (Central) branch of Cumann na mBan in November 1915. She quickly rose to a prominent position in the organisation, lecturing in first-aid in the city and in Lusk, where she described herself as 'director' of the branch.

Despite her influential position in the Women's Auxilliary, Molly failed to receive orders to mobilise Easter Monday morning. The Rebellion in Fingal was a family affair and as Molly was outside this tight knit circle she was excluded from the Volunteers' network of communication.

When she did finally report to Thomas Ashe for duty her help was readily accepted by the Fingal men. She was sent by Ashe into the city 'to post out what was happening' and continued to act as scout and courier for the rest of the week. In the aftermath of the Rising her brave endeavours - including her assistance to the wounded and dying at Ashbourne - were praised and acknowledged by all the Volunteers with whom she had served.

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# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall

Having spent the first few days of Easter week disabling telegraphic equipment in Post Offices, blowing up railway lines and bridges, and attacking RIC barracks in Swords, Donabate and Garristown, the brigade moved on towards Ashbourne in their efforts to block all lines of supply and communication into the City.

On Friday morning Ashe orders two sections of men, 21 each, to go with him and Mulcahy towards the Slane-to-Ashbourne road, (on bicycles). At Rath cross roads they dismount, and 11 men under Joe Lawless and Charlie Weston are sent into the fields on the north side of the road and proceed under cover to the back of Kilmoon RIC barracks.

Once in position they were to signal to Ashe and Mulcahy, who would proceed to the front of the barracks and order the officers there to surrender. Two home-made bombs are then thrown at the barracks and the police inside surrender. The barracks had been reinforced during the week and contained 9 officers and a District Inspector.

The sound of motor cars coming from further up the Slane road is then heard.

*"The first thing I saw was the D.I.'s whistle on the road. I knew then that all was up with him."*

Eugene Bratton, RIC



Harry Smyth



Richard Mulcahy



Ned Lawless

District Inspector Alexander "Baby" Gray had received word in Navan that the RIC barracks in Ashbourne was under attack and at 11 a.m. assembled a force of between 54 and 67 RIC men, who proceeded to Ashbourne in 17-20 motor cars.

After hours of shooting, with most of the RIC taking cover under the motor cars or in nearby ditches, they surrender.

Michael McAllister killed the first RIC man to step out of a car. Sergeant Shanagher was killed next. Joseph Lawless saw district inspector Harry Smith shoot at his father Frank, and hit and kill John Crenigan instead.

Frank Lawless then shot Harry Smyth in the head.

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*"It's too bad we have to be fighting another."*

Wounded RIC Officer



John Crenigan



James McCormack

## A four hour intense gun battle ensued.

Ambushed and thinking they were facing a much bigger force of volunteers than was the reality, the RIC abandoned the cars they arrived in, many hiding under them, and were pinned down by the sniper fire of some of the crackshots among the 5th Brigade. Eventually, with seven fatalities and many wounded they surrendered, along with the officers and constables in the barracks.

The Volunteers had lost two men, John Crenigan, and Thomas Rafferty, and a few were wounded. All wounded, on both sides, were treated by Dr. Richard Hayes.

The RIC were disarmed and told to go home and never bear arms against Ireland again.

Overjoyed with their victory, the Volunteers dispersed and returned to Newbarn, where they later received their order from Pearse to surrender. A few went on the run, but most were arrested.

All of Richard Coleman's unit, which went into the city and fought at the GPO and the Mendicity, shared the same fate. One of their number, Peter Wilson, was killed.

Most members of the Baldoyle unit of the Irish Citizen Army were also arrested. One member, James McCormack of Sutton, was killed at Beresford Place.



Thomas Rafferty

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# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall

*"Oh we are all Irishmen.  
You know me, Sir. You know me.  
Sir, I'm Glennon the boxer."*



Glennon the boxer



J. Gormley



John Young

Fourteen wounded RIC constables, including Francis P. Glennon, and one Sergeant, Patrick Scully, returned to Navan, with their fellow officers and constables. They brought the bodies of four constables, two sergeants, and their District Inspector Harry Gray. Among the wounded was also their District Inspector Alexander "Baby" Gray, who would die a month later from his wounds, in the old Navan Infirmary.

Most of the dead, who hailed from Roscommon, Cavan, Sligo, Kilkenny, Tyrone and two from Galway, were buried in Ardmulchan Cemetery, outside Navan.

Sergeant William O'Connell, and Constable Eugene Bratton were later awarded the King's Police Medal, and Sergeant John Griffin, the George's Cross.

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*"I am more interested in Fingal than in any other part of Ireland."*

Thomas Ashe in a letter to his sister Nora 12th February 1917



Released Prisoners, June 1917



Frongoch internment camp



Frank Lawless in Rath internment camp



Thomas Carty



James McDonagh



Joe Norton



Ned Stafford

Nearly 150 men and women from Fingal, both East and West, were arrested in the months following the rising, some who had been heavily involved both inside and outside the city, and many who had not been involved at all, and the majority were interred in prison camps in England and Wales. Along with members of the Fingal Brigade were volunteers such as Thomas Carty from Clonsilla, the McNulty brothers from the Mill, Blanchardstown, the Dowling, Duffy and Mooney brothers from Castleknock, the Reddins of Howth.

Place names such as Frongoch and Knutsford, Wakefield and Wandsworth, Lewes and Stafford became very familiar to the families of the Volunteers in Fingal. Some were released in time for Christmas 1916, others had to wait until the following year. It was a difficult time for many families, surviving without father, or husband, brothers and sons, in an era before social welfare. Treated like criminals as they were deported, they were welcomed home as heroes.

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# An Troid ar son Saoirse na hÉireann I bhFine Gall

*“Nothing additional remains to be said.  
That volley which we just heard is the only  
speech which is proper to make above the  
grave of a dead Fenian.”*

Micheal Collins



The Firing Party At The Grave Of Thomas Ashe. September. 30. 1917.



Thomas Ashe in Kilmainham

Returning to active service immediately on release, both Ashe and Coleman were arrested again in August 1917 on the election campaign trail for De Valera. They went hunger strike in Mountjoy and Ashe died from force-feeding. An estimated 30,000 people attended his funeral in Glasnevin, organised by Richard Mulcahy, at which Michael Collins read the brief but now famous oration above.

Richard Coleman was later released, and re-arrested and imprisoned a number of times. His house, and the Fingal houses of many of those involved in the rising, were regularly searched and raided throughout this period. He died of pneumonia during an epidemic of influenza in Usk prison, Wales, in December 1918, and was buried, after a funeral attended by thousands, alongside his comrade-in-arms at Glasnevin.

On hearing the news of Richard Coleman's death, Eamon De Valera, writing from Lincoln Jail reportedly said: 'And poor Dick Coleman has left us to join his comrades. Fingal has contributed more than its share.'

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