



## The Ashe Crest

### The Cockatrice and the Squirrel



(Taken from [Fairbairn's Crests of the Leading Families in Great Britain and Ireland](#) -- 1911)

Several hundred years ago, various authorities established that the crest in the Ashe coat of arms was a cockatrice. This paper explores the possible reasons why the Irish branches replaced it with the squirrel.

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## 1. Explanation of heraldic terms (taken from Burke's *Encyclopaedia of Heraldry or General Armory of England, Scotland and Ireland* [1844])

**Cockatrice** -- a monster with the wings and legs of a fowl, and the tail of a snake.

**Griffin, or gryphon** -- an imaginary animal, the upper half that of an eagle, and the lower that of a lion.

**Martlet, or merlion** -- a fabulous bird, shaped like a martin or swallow, and always drawn without legs, with short tufts of feathers instead, divided into two parts, somewhat like an erasure, and forming, as it were thighs. This bird is the distinctive mark of the fourth son.

**The Bend** (Baltheus) is formed by two lines drawn diagonally from the dexter chief to the sinister base, and comprises the third part of the shield. It represents a shoulder belt, or scarf.

**The Chief** (called by French Heralds, un Chef) signifying head, from the place it occupies in the shield) is the whole upper of the field, cut off horizontally by a right or any other of the partition lines used in Heraldry, and should comprise a third part of the escutcheon.

**beaked, or armed** -- all birds which have talons and bills that aid them to seize and rend their prey, are in blazon said to be armed when those weapons differ in tincture from their bodies. But to swans, wild geese, and other birds without talons, the word armed does not apply. They, in like case, are termed beaked and membered.

**bezant** -- the current coin of Byzantium, or Constantinople -- in English Heraldry, represented as round flat pieces of gold without impress.

**charged** -- (French *chargé*), applicable to the field of ordinaries bearing any other device upon them.

**chev.** -- *The Chevron* (supposed by some writers to have been adopted from the bow of a war saddle, which rose high in front) is formed by two parallel lines drawn from the dexter base, meeting pyramidically, about the fess point, two other parallel lines drawn from the sinister base.

**chevronel** -- a diminutive of the chevrons, of which it is half the size.

**close** -- denotes the wings of a bird lying to the body.

**legged, or membered** -- used when the legs of birds, etc., are to be blazoned of a different tincture to the body.

**mullet** -- the rowel of a spur; English heralds make it of five straight points; French heralds of six; when borne of six, eight, or more points, the number should be expressed in the blazon. The best authorities consider when it has more than five points it becomes a star.

**rampant** -- animals standing erect on their hind legs.

**sejant** -- signifies sitting, as applied to the lion, etc.

**slipped** -- the stalk depicted so as torn from the original stem.

**trefoil** -- three-leaved grass

**vair** -- composed originally of pieces of fur, but now silver and blue cut to resemble the flower of the campanula, and opposed to each other in rows; when of different colours, they are specified and described vairé.

**wattled** -- a term applied to the gills of a cock, when of a different tincture from the body.

**ar.** -- silver, or white

**erm** -- ermine

**gu.** -- gules, or red.

**or.** -- gold, or yellow.

**sa.** -- sable, or black

**vert** -- green

**Non nobis sed omnibus** -- Not for ourselves but for all

## 2. Devon Origins

According to [Burke](#) (1835), the family of Ashe (at various times spelled Ash, Aysh, Ayshe, Aish, Aisshe, Esh, Essye -- see the [Ashe Family](#) website for more details on the origin of the name 'Ashe') is descended from the family of Esse, who accompanied William the Conqueror from Normandy in 1066, and who lived initially in the county of Devon, as follows:

*The ancient and eminent family of ESSE, ASHE, or D'ESSECOURT, which came over with WILLIAM the Conqueror, appears by certified extracts under the seal of Ulster king of arms, -- by the authority of the Herald's College, -- and from the pages of our old historians, to have held large estates in the county of Devon, so early as the eleventh century; and the line is deducible through more than eighteen generations.*

A number of sources describe the Arms of the [Ashe Family](#) in Devon as follows:

- (a) John Burke and John Bernard Burke, [Encyclopaedia of Heraldry or General Armory of England, Scotland and Ireland](#) (1844):

ASHE, or ESHE (Sowton, Devonshire, settled there temp. Edward 111.; the last male heir, Henry Ashe, esq. died in 1763). Ar. two chev. sa. *Crest* -- A cockatrice close or, legged and beaked gu.

- (b) William Berry, [Encyclopaedia Heraldica, or Complete Dictionary of Heraldry: Vol. II](#) (1828):

*Ashe*, or *Eshe*, [Devon, 1613,] ar. two chev. sa. each charged with a trefoil slipped or. -- *Crest*, a cockatrice close ar. charged on the breast with a trefoil slipped gu.

- (c) Sir Bernard Burke, [The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales](#) (1884):

**Ashe**, or **Esse** (co. Devon, confirmed by Camden, Clarenceux, December, 1613). Ar. two chev. sa. each charged with a trefoil slipped or. *Crest* -- A cockatrice ar. charged on the breast with a trefoil slipped gu.

- (d) T. C. and E. C. Jack, [Fairbairn's Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland](#) (1905):

**Ashe**, or **Eshe**, Devonsh., a cockatrice arg., charged on the breast with a trefoil, slipped gu.

## 3. Thomas Ashe (1529-1582), first settler in Ireland

Although other Ashes may have migrated to Ireland in earlier years following the Norman invasion of England, John Burke (in Vol. II of [A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland](#)) states that [Thomas Ashe](#) (1529-1582), second son of [Nicholas Ashe](#) (1497-1552), of Clyst Fornyson in Devon, was the first settler in Ireland and that he married Mary, the only daughter and heiress of Nicholas Bailey, of St. John's Abbey, in Meath. He had four sons: Thomas, Nicholas, John and Josias. Of particular interest, in terms of the crest, are the two branches of Ashbrook and Ashfield, whose origins lie in the first son, [Thomas](#) (1567-1626).

## 4. Sir Thomas Ashe (1567-1626) and the origins of Ashbrook and Ashfield in Ireland

Thomas Ashe (1567-1626) was knighted on 25 July 1603 at Dublin Castle by Sir George Carew, Lord Deputy, in recognition of his services to the Crown in helping to put down the rebellion in Ireland, and was allocated grants of land in County Cavan. He was rewarded even more handsomely a few years later for his support in the fight against the rebellious Irish Earls and was granted land around Londonderry.

*The Ash MSS.*, written in the year 1735, by Lieut-Col. Thomas Ash, published by Henry Tyler and edited by Rev. Edward Martin in 1890, records the following:

*“In addition to the ancestral home and estates of Ashfield, which has now been in the family for more than three centuries, Sir Thomas became entitled to that of St. John’s Abbey and the estate associated with it, his mother having been the only child and heiress of her father, Nicholas Bayley. At the period of the “Plantation Settlement of Ulster”, under James I, he had large grants of confiscated lands made to him in several of the counties, especially in Cavan, near Cootehill. Here a territory, comprising altogether (State Papers) 6,500 acres of the escheated lands was assigned to him. On this estate he erected, in conformity with plantation conditions, an imposing “manor house”, named Drumsill, now Ashfield Hall, where his family subsequently often resided. They were not indifferent to the ecclesiastical and educational interests of the locality of their adoption. The parish of Killishendry was of large extent, comprising 16,500 acres, and the church was not easily accessible to all its adherents, and this family obtained, in conformity with ecclesiastical law and rule, a partition of the territory, and established a separate parish, with an endowment, which is called Ashfield after their name. Turning to the O’Neil wars, Sir Thomas was personally engaged in military command. For these services, he was amply rewarded. He obtained grants of land in the then county of Coleraine, in the environs of Londonderry, which had been deserted by the Flight of the Earls in 1607, and confiscated to the Crown, and afterwards distributed to officials, civil and military, and undertakers of various classes. These lands passed into the hands of Josias, a younger son of Sir Thomas, and through him, to John and his descendants, who still retain them, the beautiful residential seat of the family in County Derry being long known as Ashbrook.”*

**NB.** The author of the above part of the book, either Henry Tyler or Rev. Edward Martin, is incorrect in stating that Josias was a younger son of Sir Thomas Ashe. Josias was a brother of Sir Thomas, both being sons of Thomas Ashe (1529-1582), the first settler in Ireland.

Thus, both Ashbrook and Ashfield came into existence through the activities of Sir Thomas Ashe, who died in 1626. Although a number of accounts indicate that Sir Thomas died without issue, it is more correct to say that he died without male issue. The [“Clerical and Parochial Records of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross, Vol. III”](#) by William Maziere (1864) show that he had a daughter, Anne, who married the Rev. Joseph Synge, Rector of Manfieldstown and Vicar of Dundalk. Without male issue, and having been allocated large grants of land in different parts of the country, it appears that, before his death, Sir Thomas made over some of these estates to his brothers and their descendants, as follows (see also Vol. II of Burke’s [“A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland”](#)):

- (a) [Nicholas](#), whose son, Henry, had an only son, Nicholas, who was named as the successor to Sir Thomas.
- (b) [John](#), to whom Sir Thomas gave Talbot’s Castle and St. John’s Abbey near Trim, as well as Moyvalley and Dromshill in Cavan.

(c) [Josias](#), to whom Sir Thomas gave the estate in Coleraine, near Londonderry, later known as Ashbrook.

## 5. Ash of Ashbrook

Over a period of one or two generations, this branch dropped the ‘e’ from Ashe, and most references to them are with the surname ‘Ash’. The son of Josias, John Ash, married three times and had some 24 children, a number of whom died young. It was this John Ash that reportedly built Ashbrook, and from him it descended to [George Ash](#) (1679-1729), son by his third wife, Elizabeth Holland. From him, who married Mary Rankin, it went to his son, [Alderman George Ashe](#) (1712-1796), who died without issue. He bequeathed the Ashbrook property to a nephew by marriage, William Hamilton, who was the son of his sister Jane, who had married William Hamilton. The son, [William Hamilton](#), added the name of Ash, and his son William Hamilton Ash (1801-1867) had an only daughter, Caroline, who married [John-Barré Beresford](#). The Ashbrook property thus passed into the Beresford family, who also added the name of Ash to their own. The last male descendant, [John Randal Beresford-Ash](#) died in 2010.

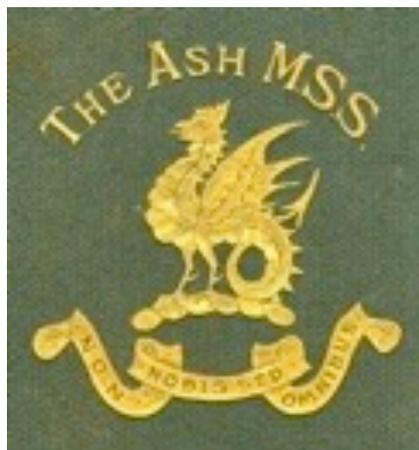
“[Fairbairn’s Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland: Volume 1](#)” (1905) has the following description:

Ash of Ashbrook, Ireland, a squirrel, *Non nobis sed omnibus*.

We can thus see that the Ashe motto has been retained.

In Burke’s “[A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Ireland](#)” (1912), the Beresford-Ash family of Ashbrook shows two crests -- one for Ash and the other for Beresford, with the Ash crest being “a squirrel sejant ppr, holding in its paws a trefoil slipped vert (ASH)”.

We now come to the first anomaly with regard to the Crest. While Fairbairn and Burke both show the crest to be a squirrel, the book cover of “The Ash MSS”, which covers the Ash family in Londonderry and the Ashbrook property, has a cockatrice as the crest:



## 6. Ashe of Ashfield

Seeking to follow the descent of the Ashe line, which held the Ashfield estates is a little more complex. As indicated above, Sir Thomas Ashe, to whom the estate was granted, died without male issue. He bequeathed the estate, initially known as Drumsill, to his brother, John, whose male line eventually died out two generations later. In his will, his son, Thomas, mentions his relation, Richard Ashe, of Ashfield. This is likely to have been [Richard Ashe](#) (born before 1686-1728), who was married to Anne Deane, and who was the son of William Ashe, of Summerstown, grandson of Nicholas Ashe, brother of Sir Thomas Ashe, and who inherited Sir Thomas' other estates from [Nicholas](#), grandson of Nicholas Ashe, who was brother to Sir Thomas.

A little complicated, but the end result was that it appears that all the estates of Sir Thomas, apart from Ashbrook, were eventually concentrated in the hands of Richard Ashe, of Ashfield.

Burke's "[Encyclopaedia of Heraldry, or General Armony of England, Scotland and Ireland](#)" (1844) contains the following description of the Ashfield branch.

ASHE (Ashfield, co. Meath, originally D'Esse, of Clyst Fornyson, co. Devon, settled in England at the Conquest, and removed to Ireland in the reign of Elizabeth. Its representative is the present Lieut.-Colonel WILLIAM WELLESLEY ASHE, of Ashfield. Sir Joseph Ashe, of Twickenham, the descendant of a younger branch of the family, was created a baronet in 1609). Ar. two chevronels sa. *Crest* -- A cockatrice or, combed and wattled gu. *Mottoes* -- Above the shield "Fight", below "Non nobis sed omnibus."

"[Fairbairn's Book of Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland: Volume 1](#)" (1905) has the following description:

Ashe of Ashfield, Ireland, and of Wilts, a cockatrice or, combed, wattled, and armed gu. *Fight* -- *Non nobis sed omnibus*.

[William Wellesley Ashe](#), of Ashfield, great grandson of Richard Ashe, of Ashfield, and Anne Deane, is shown in Burke's "Heraldic Illustrations" as using the cockatrice (the second image is a more precise version of the arms supplied by Christopher Ashe):



However, we now start to see more anomalies in terms of the crest.

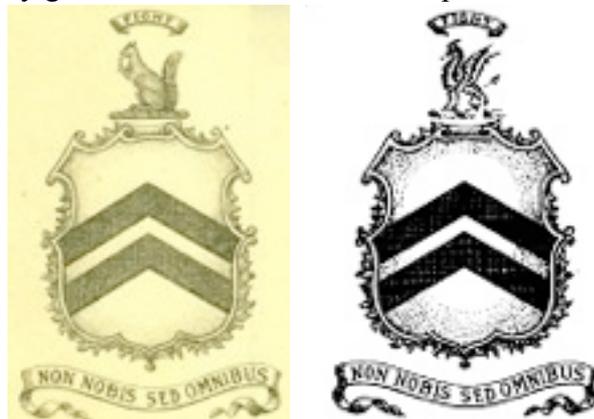
- (a) [Christopher Ashe](#), of Dublin, wrote in July 2011: “Richard Ashe who built Ashfield around 1710 placed his coat of arms, beautifully carved in limestone, and that of his wife, Anne Deane, on the front of the house. Richard used the squirrel. These two carvings are still at Ashfield and have been recently set into new gate pillars.”



- (b) Christopher goes on to say: “In a printed pedigree signed by W. Betham, Ulster King of Arms, dated January 1846, he states "I find the Ashfield family have always borne the squirrel, while the other branches have borne the cockatrice. The squirrel appears on our books to Ashfield, although the Ashes of England have always borne the cockatrice, I think you are entitled to bear the old crest. Signed W. Betham UKA, to the Rev. Isaac Ashe, Rector of Tamlaght". The [Rev. Isaac Ashe](#) (1801-1888) is descended from a younger branch of the Ashfield Ashes.
- (c) I recently found a hand-written note by my Grandfather, [Rev. Robert Pickering Ashe](#) (1857-1944), which refers to his father, Rev. George Alexander Hamilton Ashe (1812-1897), 1st cousin to the above Rev. Isaac Ashe, which indicates that he had a seal engraved with a squirrel. The note (see below) goes on to say that Burke, Ulster King of Arms, issued to him a coat of arms with the crest of a cockatrice.

George Alexander Hamilton Ashe vicar of Witton  
 Blackburn - 1839 - 189? had a seal engraved with  
 a squirrel - - Burke Ulster King of Arms  
 issued a coat of arms with crest of cockatrice  
 to Robert Peckering Ashe son of the above  
 about the year 1890 -  
 Signed Robt P. Ashe

That may explain why my grandfather switched his book plates from a squirrel to a cockatrice:



## 7. The tomb of Sir Thomas Ashe (1567-1626), of Trim

Having now seen that the squirrel and the cockatrice appear to have been used at different times by both the Ashbrook and Ashfield branches, let us now turn our attention to the tomb of the man who bequeathed the estates to each branch, Sir Thomas. His father, also named Thomas, the first settler in Ireland, was the son of [Nicholas Ashe](#), of Clyst Fornyson in Devon, who definitely used the cockatrice as his crest.

Reviewing another book, Conwell's [A Ramble around Trim amongst its Ruins and Antiquities](#) (1878), we come across a rather interesting description of the tombstone of Sir Thomas Ashe:

*“In the north-eastern corner of the old chancel, level with the surrounding green sward, is a flat stone, measuring 6 feet long, 3 feet 3½ inches wide and 5 inches thick, and covering a vault beneath. The stone is from the quarry of Ardbraccan, about eight miles distant, and is apparently of about the date 1657. It has been broken into pieces, as will be seen from the accompanying engraving, all of which have been placed in juxtaposition, with the exception of that forming the left-hand lower corner of the slab, with which fragment is lost the commencement of the last three lines of the epitaph, which we have here ventured, on supposition, to restore in brackets. The upper portion of the stone is devoted to armorial bearings. On a shield*

— a chief ermine, three pheons, impaling two chevronels for Ashe; with two crests — a griffin's head on a coronet, and a squirrel for Ashe. On the lower part of the stone, in raised letters about 2 inches high, was cut the inscription, which we propose to restore as follows : —

*Love and age have joynd in one  
To lay th[ese] two under this stone  
Sir Tho[mas] Ash his Lady Elizabeth  
[Unite their] ashes in this house of death  
[And n]ow both having run their glasses  
[They hop]e to be revived from ashes.*

*The author, whoever he may have been, of these doggrel lines, appears to have had no higher object than to make wordy capital out of the names of Elizabeth and Ashe.*

*We learn from Patent V., Treasurer's Office, that in 1617 —*

*“James I. granted to Sir Thomas Ashe, of Trim, the rectories, churches, and chapels, of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Trim, and Kildalkey ; and two parts of all the tithes and altarages of the town, rectory, or chapel of Clonard, parcel of the possessions of the late abbey or monastery of the Blessed Virgin of Trim.”*

*We learn from an Inquisition taken at Navan, 28th August, 1633, that —*

*“Henry VIII., by letters patent, dated 10th July, 34th year of his reign, granted forever to Sir Anthony St. Leger, the site, circuit, and precincts of the monastery of St. Francis, called the 'Observant, or Grey Friars of Trim' containing six messuages, with their gardens; and that these were afterwards conveyed to Sir Thomas Ashe, of Trim, who made them over, with the exception of the house called 'the Shore House,' and the Town House in Trim, to Francis (Aungier?), Baron Longford.”*

*Sir Thomas Ashe was returned as Member of Parliament for the borough of Trim in 1613; but we have been unable to ascertain the date of his death. The family of Ashe held property in different parts of the county, as will be seen from an inspection of the Meath Inquisitions. One branch of the family, from the neighbourhood of Oldbridge, migrated immediately after the Battle of the Boyne to the North, and settling in the vicinity of Magherafelt, in the County of Londonderry, soon became intermarried with the principal families in that locality.”*

This is confirmed in “[Some Notices of the Church of St. Patrick, Trim](#)” by the Rev. Richard Butler (1837):

*“On a flat stone in the Chancel, apparently of about this date, under a shield (a chief ermine 3 Pheons impaling 2 chevronels for Ashe; with 2 crests, a Griffin's head in a coronet and a squirrel for Ashe,) is the following inscription partly obliterated:*

*Love and age have joined in one  
To lay these two under this stone  
Sir Thomas Ash, his Lady Elizabeth,  
. . . . . ashes in this house of death;  
. . . . . both having run their glasses,  
. . . . . to be revived from ashes.”*

There is, however, one more interesting aspect about the tombstone of Sir Thomas Ashe. In 1938, my grandfather, Rev. Robert Pickering Ashe, made a visit to Trim, together with some of his family. He kept a hand-written diary:

Went had tea + prayers - went up to church, after much searching found in the old chancel Sir Thomas Ashe's tomb, badly broken & inscription very dim - Arms of Dalry & Ashe in the old chancel of S. Patrick's Church see over

8 Baillie August 1938 Ashe

I came here 60 years ago + got the inscription from 1<sup>st</sup> Ramble round Trim

Sir Thomas Ashe his lady Elizabeth unite their doles in this house of death And now both having worn their glasses they hope to be revived from Ashes. The date (I think) was 1628.

“A Ramble around Trim” and “Some Notices of the Church of St. Patrick, Trim” both indicate the presence of two crests -- a griffin and a squirrel. For the squirrel, it is clearly stated that this is for Ashe, but there is no indication of the family covered by the griffin, except for the diary of Robert Pickering Ashe, who wrote that it belonged to Bailey. While there are many variations in the spelling of the name of the name Bailey, Burke’s [“Encyclopaedia of Heraldry”](#) provides this:

BAYLEY. Ar. a fesse betw. three martlets gu. charged with as many plates (another bezants). *Crest* -- A griffin sejant erm. wings and fore legs or.

This is also indicated in Robson’s [“The British Herald”](#):

Bayley, ar. a fesse betw. three martlets gu. charged with as many plates. (Another, bezants.) -- Crest, a griffin sejant erm. wings and fore-legs or.

In his diary entry, Robert Pickering Ashe indicates that the griffin crest is for Bailey (NB: as is often the case, different spellings of the name occur and even he uses two different spellings -- Bailey and Baillie). Given that the father of Sir Thomas, also called Thomas, the first settler in Ireland, married [Mary Bailey](#), the daughter and heiress of Nicholas Bailey, of St. John’s Abbey, it may be expected that Thomas (first settler in Ireland) incorporated the arms of Nicholas Bailey with his own, since, through Mary Bailey, he would have taken over the large properties of Nicholas Bailey, including St. John’s Abbey. Thus, as the first son and heir of his father’s properties, Sir Thomas would have taken his father’s coat of arms. The issue of the change of crest for the Ashes in Ireland from the cockatrice to the squirrel is therefore taken right back to either Thomas Ashe, first settler in Ireland, or to his son, Sir Thomas Ashe.

One other interesting aspect is that Burke’s [“A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland: Vol. II”](#) (1835) describes the arms of [William Wellesley Ashe](#), of Ashfield, as follows:

*Arms* -- Quarterly of six: 1st and 6th, arg. two chevronels sa. for Ashe; 2nd, vert a lion rampant arg. for Fornyson; 3rd gu. a cross erm.; 4th, arg. a bend and three mullets in chief sa.; 5th, gu. a fess vair arg. and az. between, in chief a bezant charged with an anchor sa. between two stars or, and in base three martlets, two and one, of the last for Bailey.

*Crest* -- A cockatrice or, crested, armed, &c. gu.

*Mottoes* -- Above the shield, "Fight". Below, Non nobis sed omnibus.

Thus, the Ashe of Ashfield coat of arms includes both Fornyson, from Devon, and Bailey, from Ireland, which would lend support to Robert Pickering Ashe’s drawing implying that the tombstone of Sir Thomas Ashe incorporated the arms of Bailey.

## **8. The two crests -- the cockatrice and the squirrel**

While I have not yet discovered any documentary evidence for this, I think there are two possibilities to consider why there was the change from the cockatrice (England) to the squirrel (Ireland):

(1) The first possibility is that when Thomas Ashe, first settler in Ireland, married Mary Bailey and took over her father’s properties, he may have needed to re-design his coat of arms to incorporate

'Bailey'. In doing so, it is possible that he decided that, at the same time, he should distinguish the Ashe family in Ireland from the Ashe family in England by incorporating a new crest (the squirrel), while retaining the rest of the coat of arms, including the motto. This would then have been handed down to all of his sons, who would have taken the squirrel as being their crest for the various Irish branches descended from him.

(2) The second possibility takes into account the one significant event during the life of Sir Thomas Ashe, the first son and heir of Thomas Ashe, when he was knighted at Dublin Castle on 25 July 1603. It is possible that the conferring of the knighthood may have led him to redesign his coat of arms, and to adopt the squirrel. This may then have been adopted by his brothers, to whom he gave portions of his estates.

If I had to venture a guess, I think the first possibility is more probable.

Apart from the anomaly of the cockatrice appearing on the front cover of 'The Ash MSS', it appears that the Ashbrook branch have stayed fairly consistently with the squirrel as their crest. However, the Ashfield branch appears to have reverted to the cockatrice after a period of time, as evidenced by William Wellesley Ashe, of Ashfield. Just as the Rev. Isaac Ashe and the Rev. Robert Pickering Ashe both wrote to the Ulster King of Arms (Sir William Betham and Sir John Bernard Burke respectively) to obtain permission to use the cockatrice, perhaps William Wellesley Ashe did the same.

Further research at the National Library of Ireland or the College of Arms may reveal additional documentation which would confirm or correct the above possibilities.

[Robert Ashe](#)

Lombok, 8 September 2011