

Baroness Ewart-Biggs, Opposition Whip in the House of Lords, whose husband was murdered by the IRA when he was British ambassador in Dublin, died of cancer in Charing Cross Hospital on October 8 aged 63. She was born on August 22, 1929.



JANE Ewart-Biggs was driving along Birdcage Walk on her way to the Foreign Office in 1976 when she turned on her car radio and heard that her husband, who had taken up his post as British ambassador in Dublin only 12 days before, had been blown up by a land-mine. A week later she fought back her grief to tell the Irish people on television: "I feel no bitterness, there is no hatred in my heart." But what remained was a determination to do all she could to end the Irish tragedy and to spend the rest of her life working for the causes in which her husband believed.

In the process she emerged as a considerable figure in her own right. She worked for the Irish people's peace movement, founded by Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams; she toured the United States in an attempt to stop American money going to the IRA; she joined the Labour Party and, after being created a life peer, she was a front-bench spokesman and Opposition Whip in the House of Lords.

Felicity Jane Randall was born into an old Army family. But her father, Major Basil Fitzherbert Randall, died when she was three months old and her mother spent the rest of her life in mourning. Her mother's example was one factor which made Lady Ewart-Biggs particularly anxious not to retire into widowhood after her own husband's death.

She had married Christopher Ewart-Biggs, already regarded as a future ambassador, in 1960. She had doubts about her fitness to be the wife of a rising young diplomat. She had left school at 16 and was, in her own words, "a jolly little secretary at the Savoy." In fact, she proved a popular and effective figure during their posts at Algiers, Brussels and later in Paris, where they lived for nearly five years when he was minister under three ambassadors. They were delighted at the move to Ireland. Christopher Ewart-Biggs had time to give only one press conference in Dublin before he was murdered.

Before her own death Lady Ewart-Biggs said: "Everybody deals with loss in a different way. I dealt with it by becoming more involved in politics and in the sort of causes in which he was interested." She instituted the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Literary Prize as a memorial to him. She led

marches of the people's peace movement in Ireland and Britain. She worked briefly for the Savoy Hotel group again, but decided she would be better employed on lecture-tours in the United States. Then she joined the Labour Party. This surprised many of her friends. But her husband, though confined by diplomatic protocol, had been an intellectual socialist and she decided that Labour had a tradition of compassion which appealed to her.

She worked at ward level, then tried to become a candidate for the GLC and the European Parliament, but failed to get selected. But in 1981 she was nominated by Labour for a life peerage. This was not a gesture to the widow of a man murdered in the service of the state but a recognition that she would make a good working peer. Though she was surprised at the offer it came at the right time. She had worked as hard as she could for peace in Northern Ireland for five years and she felt she was ready to move on. Her elevation was warmly welcomed. Baroness Sharples, who sat on the Conservative benches and whose own husband had been murdered by terrorists in Bermuda in 1973, lent her the robes she needed when she was introduced.

Her maiden speech was on Europe — a cause which had engrossed her for most of her adult life. She was quickly absorbed into the life of the Upper House, even swimming for the Lords against the Commons. She spoke frequently and was noted for the amount of preparatory work she put into her speeches. Her industry was rewarded by successive appointments — spokesman on home affairs, overseas development and consumer affairs before becoming an opposition Whip. She published two books of memoirs: *Pay, Pack and Follow* and *Lady in the Lords*.

Lady Ewart-Biggs was a tall, striking woman, with strong features to match her spirit.

Shortly before her death she married a close friend of long standing, Kevin O'Sullivan. She is survived by her son and two daughters.