

Opinion & Analysis

Ann Marie Hourihane

Peace and reconciliation since the killing of Ewart-Biggs



Last Thursday, the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize was awarded at a reception at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Iveagh House on St Stephen's Green. I would be failing in my duty to you if I did not report that things were kind of quiet. There was no Government Minister

present. Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore sent his apologies. He was in London imploring the British not to leave the European Union. "We don't want new barriers or borders – literal or metaphorical – coming between us," he said in his speech to the Policy Network conference at the Guild-

hall on the same same night.

It was in this new political context that we Iveagh House-types spent a pleasant evening. The prize was presented by journalist and national treasure Olivia O'Leary, who was looking fab in a charcoal suit. Veteran television reporter Peter Taylor was given a special award for a career which was often spent reporting on Ireland. David McKittrick, co-author of *Lost Lives*, the compendium of the dead of the Troubles, and a previous Ewart-Biggs memorial prizewinner, stood by the wall.

I counted four people there under 40: one being one of the prizewinners (the prize was divided this year), Julieann Campbell from Derry. The others were John McDermott, a comment editor with the *Financial Times*; a charming young grandchild of the Ewart-Biggses; and the historian Robert Gerwarth.

Anglo-Irish bond

The prospect of Britain having a referendum on leaving the EU throws into sharp relief the many ways in which Ireland and Britain are bound to each other. As the Tánaiste was pointing out on Thursday night, it is 40 years since we joined the EEC together. The Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize comes from another era in Anglo-Irish relations.

In her acceptance speech, Julieann

Campbell pointed out that she was only one year old when the award was established in the wake of the assassination of the British ambassador in 1976. He died when his car was blown up by a landmine as it left the ambassador's residence, Glencairn House, Co Dublin. His three young children were nearby. His wife, Jane, was in London and heard the news of his death on the radio. Even in the terms of Ireland in the 1970s, it was deeply shocking.

But it was the good sense and generosity of Jane Ewart-Biggs after her husband's death which was most impressive, as she gave an interview to RTE about how she bore no hatred towards her husband's killers.

There is a story of how, when she was lying back in the chair getting her make-up done for that interview, she felt liquid dropping on her face and opened her eyes to see that it was the tears of the make-up woman, weeping as she worked.

Jane Ewart-Biggs was recalled with great affection on Thursday night, by those who had known her. She died of bladder cancer at 63. Her obituaries from 1992 recall that her own father had died when she was a few months old, and that her mother had mourned him for the rest of her life – an example that Jane Ewart-Biggs was determined not to emulate.

66

It was the good sense and generosity of Jane Ewart-Biggs after her husband's death which was most impressive

Robin Ewart-Biggs and his sister, Kate, were in Iveagh House on Thursday night, and Robin, who people were saying is reminiscent of his mother, presented the prize. Another person who was instrumental in establishing the prize and went on to win it, the late Garret FitzGerald, was represented by his daughter, Mary.

Julieann Campbell's book, *Setting the Truth Free: the Inside Story of the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign*, was sparked by the fate of her uncle, Jackie Duddy, who was the first person to be shot dead by the British army on Bloody Sunday. He was 17. It is his body over which Bishop Edward Daly waves the white handkerchief in the famous images of that day.

"I wasn't even born on Bloody Sunday," said Campbell. Her book is about the campaign of the relatives for a new investigation into that terrible event. They were inspired by the success of the campaign to free the Guildford Four. The campaign, as Campbell points out, was "the one aspect of Bloody Sunday that hadn't been written about".

One of the things her book unearthed is how hard it was for the Bloody Sunday relatives to enlist the support of politicians in the Republic. "It took years to break in," says Campbell. "They really had to battle to get the South on board." Although, she points out rather tactfully, once the Southerners were on board, "the support was unwavering".

Douglas Murray's book *Bloody Sunday: Truth, Lies and the Saville Inquiry*, was the other winner. His acceptance speech was read out by Julieann Campbell.

The prize is awarded to works which promote "Peace and reconciliation in Ireland. Greater understanding between the peoples of Britain and Ireland. Or, closer co-operation between the partners of the European Community."

"I was actually proud that our books fulfilled those criteria," said Campbell, a journalist with the *South Journal*. "I just thought it was the most prestigious thing ever to be on the shortlist."