ADDRESS BY HM AMBASSADOR, SIR IVOR ROBERTS KCMG, TO THE CHRISTOPHER EWART-BIGGS MEMORIAL SERVICE, ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, SUNDAY 22 JULY 2001

Christopher Thomas Ewart-Biggs was blown up by an IRA bomb 25 years ago yesterday. He had been Ambassador to Ireland for precisely 12 days. Travelling with him in the car that day were Judith Cooke, Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, who was also killed, the Permanent Under-Secretary, Brian Cubbon, himself, who was seriously injured, and Brian O'Driscoll, the Ambassador's chauffeur, who was also badly injured (and very nearly passed away in hospital) but who is happily here with us today and still a much loved and revered working member of the British Embassy. Judith Cooke was a popular and talented young woman with her whole career in front of her. Although only in her mid-twenties, she had already shown great promise. Educated at James Allen's Girls' School in Dulwich, who now have an essay prize in her honour, she went on to Girton College, Cambridge. After working in Customs and Excise, she volunteered for the Northern Ireland Office and was promoted to be Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary. Merlyn Rees, the then Northern Ireland Secretary, described her as young, exceptionally bright and "someone we had all marked out for higher things". Instead her life was so tragically truncated. We are proud to celebrate her memory today, as this is as much a service for Judith Cooke as for Christopher Ewart-Biggs, and indeed for his wife Jane, who devoted much of her remaining life to working for Irish peace.

Unlike Judith Cooke, Christopher Ewart Biggs had already had a very full life before he came to Dublin in the summer of 1976. Indeed like many of his generation, he had enjoyed a packed life before he had even entered the Diplomatic Service. After university, Christopher joined the Army in 1941 and eventually fought in the key battle in North Africa, El Alamein, in the Eighth Army, where he lost his eye. His career in the Foreign Service, which he joined in 1949, was very heavily orientated to the Arab world. He served in the Lebanon, Qatar and Algiers, as well as Manila, Brussels, and Paris in the

early '70s, where he was the Minister in the Embassy and where my wife and I first met him.

Few people have been so removed from their physical image as Christopher. His smoked glass monocle which disguised the loss of his eye, puckish sense of humour and aristocratic demeanour suggested, as he put it himself, a cross between Wodehouse and Kipling.

Yet nothing could have been further from the truth. His personal philosophy was liberal with a small 'l' and very much on the centre-left of the political spectrum. As he himself wrote when he was in Algeria, his life "was very much at risk from the anti-independence OAS terrorist group because everyone knew that I was in favour of Algeria being made independent as quickly as possible". It was therefore a bitter irony that this advocate of freedom should have been murdered by those who claimed to be liberating their own soil. And it was a striking paradox that both Christopher and Jane, who were so completely and quintessentially English, ended by committing themselves in a way to Ireland and betterment of British-Irish relations. A sometimes unrecognised syndrome in the history of our countries.

When Christopher Ewart-Biggs left school, he was described by his headmaster as "an admirable mixer, capable of getting on well with anyone". Those of us who were privileged to know him would say amen to that. As his Ambassador in Paris, Christopher Soames, said, "his warmth and companionship, coupled with his keen intelligence, gained him a varied circle of devoted friends who will mourn with his wife Jane and their young children". Indeed not only were we deprived of a dear friend and colleague but Jane and the three young children lost a husband and a devoted father.

My memory of him is of a diplomat of great intellect, devoted to his work and with a mastery of the felicitous phrase. When it came to penning speeches for The Queen's State Visit to Paris in 1972, it was Christopher who took on the task personally and few, if any, people I have known have been able to write with such fluency, and such

epigrammatic style. Under the pseudonym Charles Elliott, he wrote a series of novels (which he himself described as a little bit sub Graham Greene), one of which was banned in France and Ireland as being too explicit (recent visitors to Paris, and indeed Dublin, can only gape at how mores have changed). He was an exemplary taskmaster and a delightful friend whose gentleness of manner, sensitivity and sense of humour made him a remarkable raconteur and companion and in every way an ornament to his profession. It is appropriate that a lasting memorial to him was set up in the form of the Christopher Ewart Biggs literary prize, which has attracted entries of the highest quality and has many distinguished winners.

In a briefing with journalists less than 24 hours before he was murdered, Christopher concluded with a remark he had made earlier to the British-Irish Association, which formed the core of his approach to the crisis in Northern Ireland: "I have", he said, "one prejudice, acquired during the Second World War and reinforced again in Algeria: a very distinct and strong prejudice against violence for political ends".

He was not, of course, the first to express such sentiments, nor the last. Daniel O'Connell had said much earlier that no political reform was worth the shedding of one drop of blood. And if the last 30 years have taught us anything, down the miserable catalogue of 3,000 lost lives, in every quarter of the communities in Northern Ireland, and indeed in this jurisdiction and in Great Britain and in various points of the European mainland, it is that the physical force tradition which has so infected life on this island and on that day, 25 years ago, cast such a deep shadow over British and Irish relations, has been shown to have run its course. And we have heard welcome, if belated, recognition of that from the leadership of the republican movement.

It is entirely apposite that last year's winner of the Ewart-Biggs Literary Prize was the book by David McKittrick and his colleagues, entitled 'Lost Lives', which is a searing catalogue of those same deaths.

The days are of course long gone when diplomatic status was a guarantee of immunity. Nowadays it tends to mark you as a target, and while it would be comforting to think that the days of diplomatic murders were over, sadly, as the dreadful fate of our colleague in Athens, Brigadier Saunders, last year demonstrated, we are some considerable way from that yet. A high-profile murder of a diplomat achieves international notoriety for the perpetrators. They hope to achieve their aim through the symbolic importance of committing, vicariously, violence to the state which sent the envoy.

And indeed, as Garret FitzGerald said at the service in St Patrick's Cathedral a week after the murder in words which fully bear repeating, "no doubt the perpetrators calculated that relations between us would be severely weakened, perhaps permanently damaged by such an atrocity. That the opposite has been the case is now evident to all. Our two peoples, whose pasts have been so closely linked for ill and for good throughout eight centuries, have confounded our common enemy by responding to this tragedy with a deepened sense of our close interdependence, and of our common interest in combating violence and averting anarchy. Politicians, press and people in our two islands have instinctively understood the trap set for them by evil men and have been drawn closer together in the aftermath of this murder". This drawing together was greatly promoted by Jane Ewart-Biggs' moving and brave television interview (which still shines down the years for those of us who saw it). As Mary Holland, on receiving the Literary Prize in 1989, put it, "She didn't turn away from us", very much in the spirit of Christopher and what he stood for. Jane made clear that she felt no bitterness but wanted everyone to remember the ideals for which Christopher had stood. "More than anything else", she said, "I want them to bear fruit." Indeed Jane saw to it that they did, embarking on a life of public and political service and considerable achievement, helping set up not only the Literary Prize to encourage peace and understanding between the Irish and British peoples, but a community prize for cross-community achievements in Northern Ireland. All in a way another unforeseen and unforeseeable product of the sacrifice of his life.

So, as Garret FitzGerald said, in conclusion so presciently, "Christopher Ewart-Biggs could not have conceived that within two brief weeks of his arrival, he would have made,

at the cost of his own gallant life, a unique contribution to the aims he fought to serve, a contribution which, had he lived, he would have dedicated himself to achieving by the slower process of diplomatic action".

As we today commemorate that contribution 25 years on, we remember too that while evil men of whom Garret spoke may have murdered him, they were unable to bury the ideals of reconciliation on this island for which he stood, which his death paradoxically helped entrench more firmly and which today we have never been closer to achieving.