

TRAGEDY at TANGLEY

Salutes to voice of rural England

By **Rebecca Paveley**

THE leading figures of British politics today led tributes to the man who loyally served his constituents and country for more than 20 years.

Setting aside party politics, the Prime Minister was united with opposition leaders in grief at the tragedy.

Tony Blair said he was horrified by the news of the death of the MP and his wife in the house blaze.

"My feelings went out to the family of Michael Colvin and his wife as soon as I heard of the terrible fire at their home. Now that it seems likely that they lost their lives I am truly saddened by such appalling news."

Tory leader William Hague praised one of his most stalwart colleagues. "I knew Michael as a true Tor, in the best sense of the word. He cared about his country and he cared about the countryside.

"Throughout his distinguished career in Parliament, most particularly when he was chairman of the defence select committee, he spoke with intelligence and passion on defence issues.

"We saw that again earlier this week during the defence debate when he gave an excellent speech. Michael was also a strong voice for the countryside and for country sports at a time when the rural way of life is under increasing attack.

"I visited Michael's constituency last year and was struck, as one could not fail to be, by the great affection in which both he and Nichola were held in by members of their local party and by his constituents. Michael and Nichola Colvin will be sadly missed in Hampshire and in Westminster."

Euro MP Roy Perry was a close friend of the Colvins and the chairman of the Romsey and Waterside Conservative Association at the time Mr Colvin was selected. He said: "Nichola said on the day of Michael's selection: 'You get two for the price of one'. She certainly lived up to that promise, working tirelessly by his side.

"He was an absolute natural for a rural Hampshire constituency. He farmed close on 1,000 acres so knew at first hand the problems and joys of a rural way of life. As a couple they were absolutely 100 per cent reliable in attending constituency events. Like any politician, Michael had his detractors but now we all

realise what is really important and what we have lost. A genuine and devoted couple who put public service first."

Party chairman Michael Ancram had dinner with the Colvins only last week at Botleigh Grange, Hedge End. He said: "Michael was a highly respected and valued colleague in Parliament, a true Conservative and champion of the party.

"Both he and Nichola were held in great affection by all who knew them. We will miss them both. My thoughts and prayers go out to their family."

Kindness remembered

NEW Forest East MP Dr Julian Lewis said he was "thunderstruck" at the news of Mr Colvin's death.

Dr Lewis inherited part of Mr Colvin's former Romsey and Waterside constituency when the boundaries were redrawn before the last general election.



And Dr Lewis (pictured) has recently taken Mr Colvin's place on the defence select committee.

He said: "When I was selected to fight New Forest East, Michael came over within 48 hours to offer support

and advice.

"It was typical of his kindness. "In my early days in Parliament I knew I could always turn to him for guidance.

"He offered me nothing but encouragement, good advice and friendship."

Dr Lewis also praised Mr Colvin's wife Nichola, saying she was very supportive of her husband.

Hampshire County Council leader Ken Thornber also called him a champion of rural life

