

White poppies are laid peacefully

By David Pallister

SHORT memories and exceptional security marked Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph yesterday. The sudden furore this year over the Peace Pledge Union's white poppies, which Mrs Thatcher viewed "with distaste," did not prevent the white wreath being laid after the main ceremony for the sixth year running, honouring a tradition that goes back to 1933. "When shall we ever learn?" said the message.

There was the usual National Front march of mainly army-booted skin-heads. "They're desecrating the memorial," said one middle-aged woman onlooker, in evident distress. Earlier this year Mr Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, urged the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Newman, to try to persuade the National Front to hold their parade on another day, "when it would be less offensive." As it was, they carried their banner "No more brothers war," apparently a slogan of fraternal sympathy with the armies of the Reich.

The Front were kept well away from the much larger Anti-Fascist Action march, which went to the Imperial War Museum for a public meeting. A small group was allowed to lay four wreaths in memory of the victims of racist attacks and murders in Britain today. One was laid by Cella Stubbs, the friend of Blair Peach, who was killed at a demonstration against the National Front in Southall in 1979.

A feminist slogan painted on the cenotaph in Bristol was removed in time for the morning's official service. "Dead men don't rape," was sprayed in red. Two women were arrested.

In Canterbury Cathedral the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, said it was necessary to resist contemporary criticisms that Remembrance Day was "irrelevant, negative, complacent and militarist." Heroism, he said, was an antidote to cynicism.

Belfast's Lord Mayor, Mr Sammy Wilson, did not invite Northern Ireland ministers to a wreath-laying ceremony in the city, as a protest against the Anglo-Irish agreement.