

Security links mar Cenotaph silence

By Maev Kennedy

THE only disturbance during the Remembrance Sunday commemoration at the Cenotaph was electronic.

The Peace Pledge Union marched in complete silence down Whitehall to lay its wreath of white poppies, provoking no more than a murmur or two of protest from onlookers. Two factions of the National Front gathered at Victoria could not agree on how their march should be organised, and the police banned it five minutes before it was due to move off.

But after the first stroke of Big Ben and a field gun fired from Horse Guards Parade had marked the beginning of two minutes of silence it was broken by the beeping of mobile telephones, the chatter of instructions from a television camera platform, and police walkie-talkies.

After the wreath-laying, when the Queen had led members of the Royal family, and representatives of the Government, Opposition, and the Commonwealth back into the old Home Office Building, a television camera was permitted, for the first time, at the foot of the Cenotaph, ready to zoom in on the faces of the veterans, proud, elated or weeping, the blind from St Dunstan's Home, and the wheelchair-bound from the Star and Garter home, as they moved past.

The crowds who made their way to Whitehall on a cold, misty morning through police searches and electronic security gates were slightly down on previous years.

Police had intended to keep the marchers well apart, but the Salvation Army had barely left Whitehall when some 2,000 members of Anti-Fascist Action arrived. They passed the Cenotaph in silence with banners furled, after laying a wreath of carnations, but began to chant slogans against the National Front as they marched off to a public meeting.

By the time 200 members of the Peace Pledge Union arrived, the police presence heavily outnumbered the marchers and the few onlookers.

Mr Frederick Tubby, from Harlow, was one ex-serviceman who found the spectacle of the union's march and the wreath and individual white poppies members added to the sweep of scarlet around the memorial "disgusting. There's only one poppy and it's red," he said.