

LETTERS

Bomber Command's shame

From: Tom Ball, Friend of The Green Park

The plain truth about the Bomber Command memorial is that that is exactly what it isn't. The huge ungainly and bludgeoning structure, ill fitting a site where it has no right to be, conveys nothing of a memorial; a place for consideration, for humanity, remembrance and recall; a place to reflect on the sufferings and the cause of hideous destruction and huge loss of life.

This is a monstrous monument not to the memory of those who were sent to their deaths in inadequate machines; but to those who still do not recognise the full inhumanity of their achievement 67 years on. Dresden was needlessly destroyed when it was known that war was com-

ing to an end in a matter of weeks.

The hell bent determination of the machinery behind this monster trampled over civil rights, with Minister Margaret Hodge responsible for the Royal Parks whose policy, like that of Westminster Council, said no to more memorials in the area, was deliberately set aside. Both Authorities totally failed to exercise a duty of care to preserve the historic and unique parkland. The Green Park, deemed as countryside in the City since the time of Charles II with its understanding that there were to be no permanent structures, and that it was there for the community to enjoy, has been raped and devastated forever by this hideous act. All were well aware of the fact that an appropriate site was near the 'war office' and the National RAF memorial to World Wars One and Two; but none would listen to reason.

It stands as a monument to shame all who brought it about. The place of remembrance to the 55 000 who died in the service, is in the calm of the RAF Church of St Clement Danes, where all are remembered by name in the Books of Remembrance; or at Runnymede, Lincoln Cathedral, and memorials around the country. Why did Bomber Command Association, instead of wasting £6 million on a dead pile, not follow the greatly admired Leonard Cheshire VC who created the living memorial for the disabled, and continuing to care long after the war? ■



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Tom Ball's images of the new Bomber Command memorial, before and after



Bryan Avery's images of the new Bomber Command memorial and of the new Underground Station in the park



What's the fuss?

From: Bryan Avery, SW1

After reading all the recent angry correspondence about the Bomber Command Memorial, I did a detour to see it last week.

I confess I love monuments; they are the mementos of a nation and add immeasurably to the richness of the civic experience. However, the thought that any monument could cause such terminal damage as that described in the letters deserved a look, especially as I'd always considered that Green Park, which at one time had been a dignified royal pleasure park with classical pavilions and a beautiful lake like St. James's, had, apart from its two magnificent avenues of London Planes, long since degenerated into a kind of dull recreation ground beset by noise and the thousands of tourists trafficking between the tube and Buckingham Palace.

Approaching from within the park then the first big surprise was that I couldn't find it; its way off the beaten track and almost totally hidden.

The second big surprise was its siting. For those who don't know it, the Park is triangular and comes to a point at Hyde Park Corner where Piccadilly and Constitution Hill meet and there, at one of the biggest and noisiest traffic roundabouts in London, where no one without ear defenders and a particulate filter would dare linger long, is the memorial. It sits not within the park as described, but on the roadside by Piccadilly near where a dank pedestrian underpass was the last time I was there and alongside the incessant roar of the Piccadilly underpass. It isn't at all the leafy idyll depicted in the pictures.

The third big surprise was the monument's scale. From the rhetoric, I'd expected something of

huge and brutal bombast like Lutyens' Thiepval memorial, but it's disarmingly modest, even tiny in the history of these things. It reminded me of the delightful little Neue Wache by Shinkel in Berlin. It is similarly intimate and has an oculus to the sky and a roof formed of an aluminium diagrid in a reference to Barnes Wallis' structure for the Wellington. We may all have a view on the appropriateness of the architectural language but it does, to my eye at least, sit very comfortably in its contiguity. It certainly doesn't jar.

The fourth and biggest surprise of all however, and the really telling discovery for me, was the sight of another new building also nearing completion at the other end of the park.

This building is bigger by far; it is solid not open, incorporates a substantial substation, a huge double-height canopy and features dramatic ramps and earthworks. I like it. It's a clever piece of architecture. However, it sits in exactly the same relationship to the park as the Bomber Command Memorial, and this new building isn't hidden. On the contrary, it dominates the views both from within the Park and from Piccadilly and directly abuts some of the most historically sensitive facades in St James – and nobody has said a word.

Where were Messrs Darley, Hall and Ball et al when the new Green Park tube station was being planned? The silence is hugely telling. Clearly the real anger is not about the scale or the propriety of structures within the parks; still less the style of architecture. ■

iPILLO!



Boris says 'thanks'

Writing to his supporters after his election win: "Yesterday I signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office at City Hall which confirmed me as the Mayor of London for the next four years.

In my speech, I repeated my thanks to the people of London for giving me a second mandate and I promised everybody in this city that I and my team will work our socks off to deliver on our vision and our programme for the capital...

I am honoured and grateful. I feel like some overweight Alpinist carried on the shoulders of others to the summit of a great mountain...

I will deploy every sinew of my body in the task of driving London forward with the 9 point plan I took to the people of London - ensuring growth, jobs, investment and a better future.

Thank you. The work begins."

London for Life!

Ben Macintyre writing in *The Times* has lived in New York, Paris and London. He compares their virtues saying "I like London roughly twice as much as I like New York, but three times as much as I like Paris".

He concludes "I adore all three cities in quite

different ways. But for abundance of civilisation, historical magnificence, architectural diversity, amusing shabbiness and sheer fascination, London wins hand down. New York for excitement. Paris for love. But give me London for Life.

Piano garbage

Interviewed by the *AJ* as his 'Shard' nears completion, architect **Renzo Piano** was asked 'What does it mean to be a contemporary architect?' He replies: "To be an architect you need to be a master builder, a militant, a poet and an historian. But you have to be a master builder; otherwise all this is garbage.

Murray swims in

Stewart Murray, current Chief Planner at Redbridge, will replace **Giles Dolphin** as Assistant Director of Planning at the GLA in the autumn.

Londough is where the money is

The Times lampoons *The Economist*:

Who are you calling skint?

This week, *The Economist* published a mocking map of Scotland, making the point that, without English money, an independent Scotland would be strapped for cash. But without London money so would the rest of England. **Hugo Rifkind** (from Edinburgh) fighes back.

