

MMT NEWS

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THE MONUMENT TO NATIONAL LIBERATION, ŽIŽKOV

The Monument to National Liberation on Žižkov, overlooking the city of Prague (fig. 1) was conceived as a ceremonial national mausoleum in the early years of the 20th century and over the subsequent decades its significance and role in political thought and meaning took on new associations representing shifts in political ideology and power. On a prominent raised position oriented west, it faces the Royal Castle and Cathedral of St. Vitus across the river Vltava.

Its role as a mausoleum was perhaps most impor-

Fig 1: The Monument

tant during the Communist era of the 1950s and 1960s, when it became the honorary last resting place of the leaders of the 'Czech, Slovak and national working class movement', although from the inception of its design, this integral function was intended.

The site for the memorial was the place where Jan Žižka gathered Hussite warriors on a hill to the east of Prague in the fifteenth century to defeat foreign invasionary forces. On 14 July 1420 at the Battle of Vitkov, Žižka led his warriors, outnumbered by ten to one, to defeat Papal forces led by the Emperor Sigismund. This significant event would be recalled several centuries later when in the late 1860's over 15,000 people attended a rally on the Žižkov hill in support of political demands

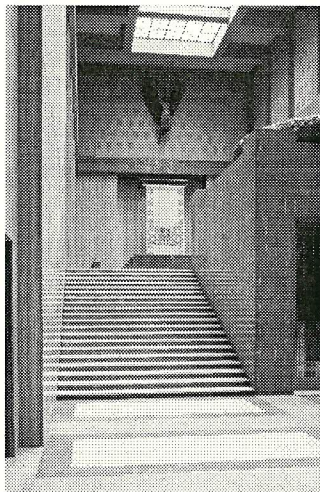


Fig 2: Entrance and stairs to the Ceremonial Hall

Over fifty entries were submitted, but the beginning of the First World War halted progress, and it was not until the 1920s that the idea was revived, this time to acknowledge the bravery and sacrifice of the soldiers and citizens of the newly formed

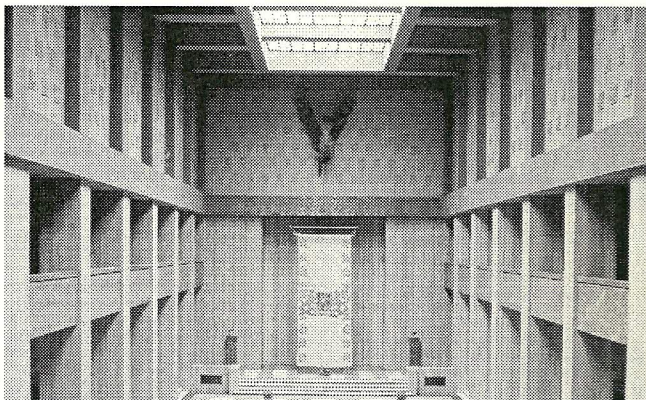


Fig 3: The Ceremonial Hall

nation of Czechoslovakia, who had fought for freedom against the forces of the Hapsburg empire.

Further competitions for the memorial were announced in 1923 and 1925, this time to include a building, with the intention that it contain a memorial hall for burial of national heroes of the new Czechoslovak nation. The design by Jan Zázvorka, a pupil of Jan Kotera, was selected in 1925, though it was some four years before work began. The main elements of the design included two great halls within the large rectangular granite faced block. To the west, in front of the main ceremonial entrance, a large equestrian statue of

for a Czech nation, free from the oppression of the imperial Austrian government in Vienna.

In the late 19th century proposals for a commemorative statue of the warrior Žižka were discussed and in 1913 a competition was held.

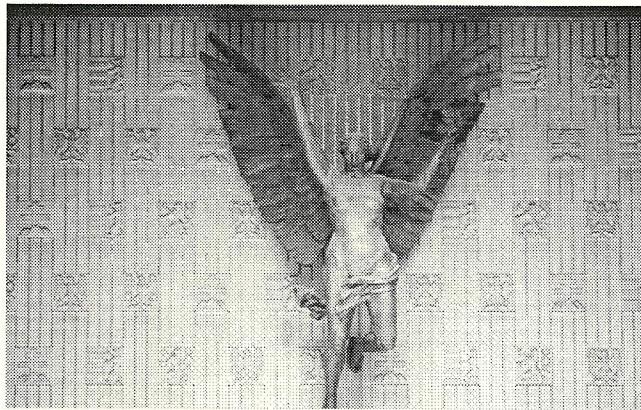


Fig 4: Victory by Karel Kotrba

Jan Žižka was to be placed upon a raised plinth above the tomb of an unknown soldier. These were linked to the building by a raised balustraded terrace, with steps leading down to a levelled ground area extending along the spine of the hill to the west.

The monumental geometric modernist exterior was echoed inside by interiors of stripped classical form and proportion, with surfaces sheathed in coloured marbles and mosaics. Construction began in 1929 and the shell of the monument was largely finished by 1933, while work on the decorative finishes of the interior continued through the 1930s. Nearly all was complete, with the exception of the great statue of Jan Žižka, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, for the 20th anniversary of independence in October 1938.

The upper of the two great interior spaces, the Ceremonial Hall, (figs. 2 and 3) was intended for memorial gatherings and state meetings, and designed as a longitudinal space, similar to the nave of a church with a raised floor at the east end, and rows of seating arranged through the length of the interior. A bronze sculptural figure of 'Victory' by Karel Kotrba was raised high above the floor at the east end of the Hall (fig. 4) and at the opposite west end an organ was placed at gallery level.

The Central Hall, reached by stairs leading down from the entrance and situated directly below the Ceremonial Hall, was intended as the final resting place for legionaries who had fought to defend the newly formed republic, and whose remains were to be placed beneath and within rows of richly coloured red marble slabs and sarcophagi.

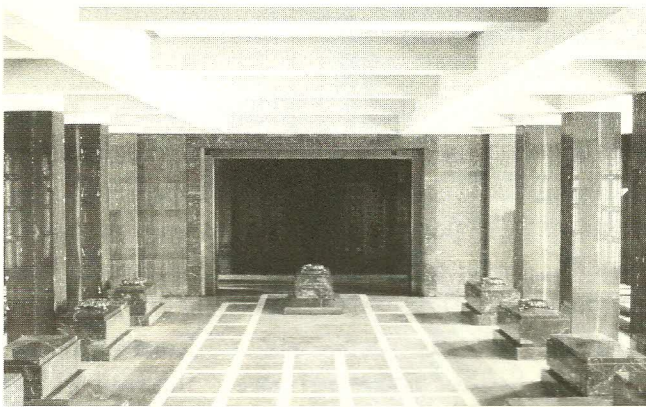


Fig 5: Central Hall

The hall was arranged into a central nave and aisles (fig. 5), and its walls, floor and columns lined with different coloured marbles. Four giant sculpted marble relief panels executed between 1936 and 1938 by Karel Pokorný commemorating fallen Czech and Slovak Legionaries were mounted at the east and west ends of the aisles (figs. 6 and 7).



Fig 6: Central Hall, side aisle

At the west end of the Central Hall two doorways lead into a columbarium, its walls lined with square white marble slabs (fig. 8). In the centre of the floor lie four great black marble sarcophagi, and three bronze candelabra designed by Jaroslav Horejc. Two bronze statues symbolising 'Loyalty' and 'Heroism' by Otakar Švec stand against the east wall.

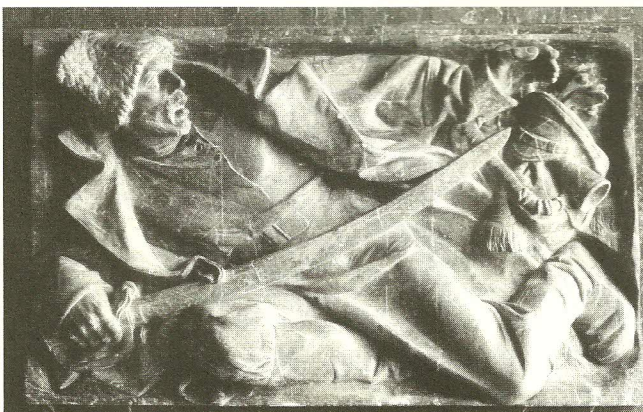


Fig 7: Soldier, by Karel Pokorný

Three special chambers lie to the east of the Hall. The one in the centre originally was intended as the mausoleum for Tomáš Masaryk the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic, though he declined this in preference to burial at the cemetery at Lány. To the north through bronze and glass doors (fig. 9) lies the Hall of the Fallen People which was decorated in 1934 with mosaics by Max Švabinský, symbolising the sacrifice of the common people of Czechoslovakia during the First World War. The great bronze doors are decorated with modelled relief panels by the sculptor Jaroslav Horejc, who was also responsible for the candelabrum standing in-between (fig. 10). At the

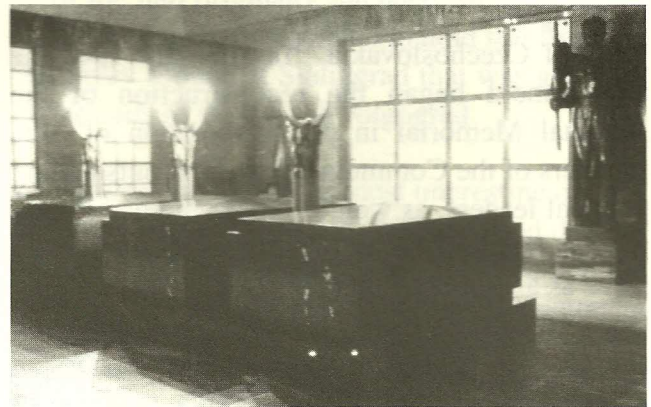


Fig 8: The Columbarium

entrance on the east and west walls great white marble slabs are inscribed in gold with verses by Vítěslav Nezval, while in the centre of the north wall, raised on a high marble plinth stands Jan Štursa's bronze statue 'The Wounded' of 1917 (fig. 11).

Ironically, the completion of the interior in 1938 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the formation of the new nation occurred at just the moment when the countries of western Europe agreed to its annexation by Germany on the eve of the Second World War. Shortly before a decree by the Nazis calling for the destruction of nationalistic symbolic sculpture and decoration, some contents and decorative elements were removed from the monument while others such as the great marble relief panels by Karel Pokorný mounted on the aisle walls of the Central Hall and the mosaic panels were covered beneath painted plaster surfaces to hide them. Nevertheless many

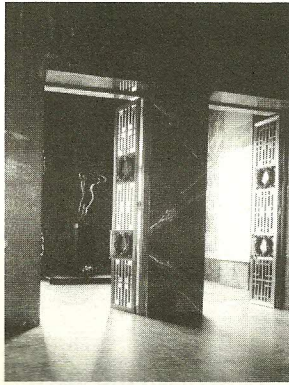


Fig 9: *The Great Bronze Doors*

works of art were removed, and decorative finishes, metal grilles, screens, doors, and door frames were destroyed by the Nazis who used the monument to store military equipment during the war.

Following their expulsion by the Soviets and the end of the Second World War, the identity of the memorial took on a new significance and political meaning with the emergence of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In February 1948 the Government began the reconstruction of the National Memorial in commemoration of the founders of the Communist Party and outstanding political leaders, as well as those who had fought for the freedom of the Czechoslovak nation, to serve as an honorary burial place.

One of the primary objectives was the completion and erection of a great statue of the warrior Jan Žižka by the sculptor Bohumil Kafka, the pupil of Stanislav Sucharda and J. V. Myslbek, at the west end of the monument, which had never progressed beyond model stage. This had been the greatest of the last unfinished works by Kafka before his death during the war in 1942 (fig. 12). Unveiled in July 1950, it is over nine metres in height, nine and one half metres long and five metres wide,

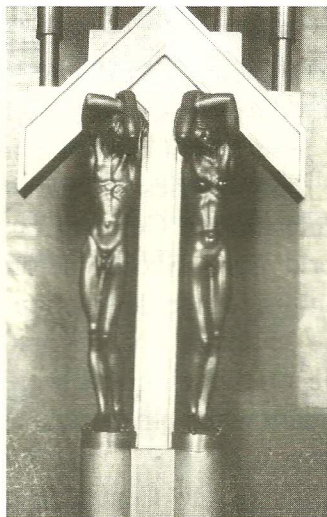


Fig 10: *The Bronze Candelabrum*

and is still believed to be the largest equestrian statue in the world.

From 1951 the National Memorial became the burial place for 'leaders of the Czechoslovakian working class' and the founders of the party. The remains of personalities including Bohumil Šmeral, S.K. Neumann, Marie Majerová, Ivan Olbracht, Karel Kreibich, Josef Haken, Bohuslav Vrbenský, Václav Vacek, General Cenek Hruska, Antonin Sochor and others were interred in the columbarium at the west end of the Central Hall. The red marble sarcophagi in the nave of the Central Hall were reserved for the remains of the



Fig 11: *The Wounded*

Presidents of Czechoslovakia, Antonin Zapotocký and Ludvik Svoboda, while beneath the marble slabs in the aisles were interred the remains of outstanding personalities of the era, including Gustav Kliment, Václav Nosek and Štefan Major.

The place of honour, the centre chamber at the east end of the Central Hall originally intended for the remains of Masaryk, became the resting place for the body of Klement Gottwald, the first 'workers' president', which was placed on public view within a glass sarcophagus in December of 1953, where it remained for eight years before it was removed and later cremated in 1962. During that time a team of over one hundred people were responsible for the care of Gottwald's mummified body, which slowly decayed in spite of constant renewal of embalming fluids every eighteen months.



Fig 12: Equestrian statue of Jan Žižka by Bohumil Kafka



Fig 13: Monument to National Liberation from the east showing apsidal ended hall



Fig 14: Interior view of the Hall

The last portion of the monument to be completed forms an extension to the east commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Soviet Army's liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1955. Designed by Jan Zázvorka, the winner of the competition in 1925, the Hall of the Soviet Army was dedicated to the memory of the Soviet soldiers who had lost their lives (figs. 13 and 14). Zázvorka's new hall took the form of a double height apsidal chapel, which was seamlessly integrated with the earlier monumental cubist forms. Inside the walls were covered with mosaics designed by Vladimír Sychra depicting different branches of the Soviet armed forces. The white marble sarcophagus at the centre of the hall originally intended for the remains of Masaryk was appropriated to hold soil from the Mamayev Mound at Stalingrad that was given by the citizens of the city of Volgograd.

Whilst forming one of the most interesting ensembles of architecture, design, sculpture and decorative arts by Czech artists of the 20th century, the meaning and relevance of this great monument has reflected over time different political ideologies of the Czech nation. With the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989 the remains of the bodies were removed in 1990 from within the monument, and it has to some extent fallen from the awareness of both Czechs and visitors to the country. Now under the care of the National Museum, though only open to visitors on special occasions at present, it is intended that it will be opened as a museum on a regular basis again once fully restored.

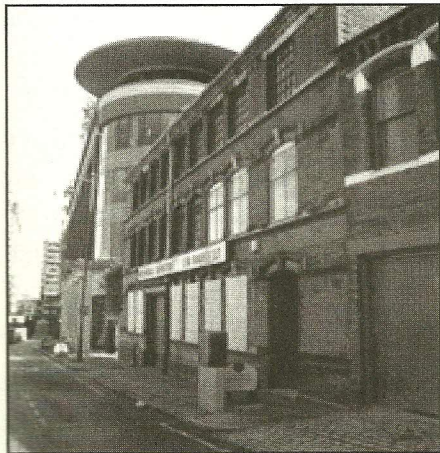
Acknowledgements:

The author would like to thank the Deputy Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic, and the Director of the National Museum, Prague, for arranging special access to the Monument to National Liberation.

See also: Stanislav Mašek, 'The National Memorial on Žižkov', Prague, and Matthew S. Witkovsky, 'Tales of an Absent Monument'.

Ed Diestelkamp

NEWMAN'S COFFIN WORKS



NEWMAN Bros. as featured on the last series of BBC's Restoration, was a family-run factory established in Birmingham's unique Jewellery Quarter. The firm made some of the world's finest coffin furniture, including the fittings for the funerals of Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain and Diana, Princess of Wales.

Production stopped in 1998. What is left behind is an extraordinary, frozen picture of the life of a Victorian factory. It is more than a building with artefacts. Newman Bros closed so recently that historical memories and skills still survive in the workforce. This was recognised by English Heritage when it registered the site as an outstanding survival. The buildings are now listed at Grade II.

There is warehousing and offices on the first two floors with the shroud room above. The factory is heaving with old stock, company records, patterns and fine craftwork. At the back are two long ranges of workshops, including a stamp shop with its original battery of four drop stamps. Beyond is the electroplating room.

The aim is to secure the long term future of this outstanding heritage asset which sits just a few minutes walk from the heart of the city centre, as a museum, supported by converting parts of the building to high quality managed offices. It will give the building new life and allow the public access to Newman Bros. It is hoped the project will progress as a partnership between

Birmingham Conservation Trust - with its expertise in imaginative and sensitive conservation - and Advantage West Midlands, which bought the building in April 2003.

The MMT is organizing a special one-off guided tour of Newman's on **Saturday 16 October**. This special opening is by kind permission of the Birmingham Conservation Trust and will show the factory exactly as it was left when trading ceased. It will be exciting to see it now, while it still retains its unique atmosphere, before the contents are moved prior to its conversion into a museum.

It is hoped that visits to the nearby cemeteries of Warstone Lane and Key Hill will also be included. If there is enough interest, a light lunch will also be arranged and included in the price, although travel to Birmingham must be organized independently. At the time of going to print, the likely cost of this excursion is not known but if you are interested please complete the enclosed slip and **return it to the Secretary by Monday 30 August.** Full details will then be sent when ready. (Returning the slip does not bind you to attending).

BOOK REVIEWS

John M Clarke: *London's Necropolis: A Guide to Brookwood Cemetery* (Sutton Publishing, 2004, ISBN 0750935138, 300pp hardback, £30)

In 1854, a group of enterprising businessmen bought 2,200 acres of common land formerly known as "the Waste of Woking" with the aim of turning it into a cemetery large enough to house all of London's dead for the foreseeable future.

Named Brookwood Cemetery or the London Necropolis, this was to become one of the UK's largest and most spectacular cemeteries, boasting sections for Muslims, Hindus and Parsees and having its own railway line from London. Only 400 acres were used, but this proved ample for the purpose. During the 20th century, many of Brookwood's imposing monuments fell into decay, but it is now being restored, and has become an impressive heritage site.

John Clarke has been a cemetery guide for 15 years, and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Brookwood. The extent of his research is admirable. His fascinating book contains details of hundreds of memorials (including over 30 mausolea) and brief biographies of the people interred there. These include Victorian military heroes, writers, aristocrats and the notorious Edith Thompson, hanged for her husband's murder in 1923. There are separate sections of the cemetery for groups such as Oddfellows and actors, as well as for different national and religious groups.

The book is well-illustrated with maps of various areas of the cemetery, which are immensely useful for visitors, given the huge size of the site. There are black and white photographs of many of the more interesting and noteworthy monuments, including the octagonal Garland mausoleum, the unusual, Italianate Drake Mausoleum and the starkly Modernist Mauroux mausoleum. 20 of the memorials are now listed by English Heritage

This book is an invaluable companion for anyone visiting Brookwood, and will be immensely useful to anyone with an interest in funerary architecture.

Chris Willis

LAST LANDSCAPES by Ken Worpole

Reviewed by John Hooper

Last Landscapes is an exploration of the cult and celebration of death, loss and memory. It traces the history and design of burial places throughout Europe and the USA, ranging from the picturesque tradition of the village churchyard to the tightly packed "cities of the dead", such as the Jewish Cemetery in Prague and Pere Lachaise in Paris. Other burial places Mr Worpole writes about in this book include the war cemeteries of northern France, Viking burial islands in central Sweden, Etruscan tombs and early Christian catacombs in Italy and the Stockholm Woodland Cemetery. He discusses cemetery design in North America citing Mount Auburn, Massachusetts, and Forest Lawn in California.

It is widely acknowledged that cemeteries today are both poorly designed and physically and culturally marginalised. Cemetery management now means that memorials are all too often insignificant, standing row on row without individual character and style. Mr Worpole writes about the modes of disposal and how they vary across Europe and North America according to religious and other cultural influences. *Last Landscapes* raises questions as to how, in an age when cremation is so popular, architects and landscape designers might create meaningful structures and settings in the absence of a body. Other forms of memorialisation within modern societies are explored; in particular Duisburg Park in Germany, formerly a giant steels works in the Ruhr Valley.

Mr Worpole obviously has a great admiration for the Stockholm Woodland Cemetery for references to this appear frequently. This book is informative and readable and is directed mainly towards the layperson as well as the urban planner and to those who are perhaps fairly new to the subject. It is quite well illustrated with photographs, both black and white and colour, taken by his photographer wife, Lorraine. Published by Reaktion Books Ltd, 79 Farringdon Road, EC1M 3JU. www.reaktionbooks.co.uk.

SECRETARY S NOTES

It has been a fairly quiet time in the office during the last few months, although we have just taken part in the London Architecture Biennale. Clerkenwell was chosen to host the first Biennale because the area houses a high percentage of the movers and shakers of today, and enjoys such a wealth of history. Architecture today is the subject of popular interest and never before has London been home to so many leading international practices. Along with our colleagues here in Cowcross Street, we have participated in an exhibition of the work of all the other charities and organisations situate in our building. It has given us a chance of bringing ourselves to the attention of those who do not yet know about our work and the opportunity of net-working with colleagues in similar organisations.

Our first Lecture series held in April at the Paul Mellon Centre in Bedford Square was a successful venture and the two lectures, our Chairman Tim Knox on Tyntesfield, Nr Bristol, and John Harris on his Recollections of a Country House Snooper, were very much enjoyed by those present. We hope to continue this series next year.

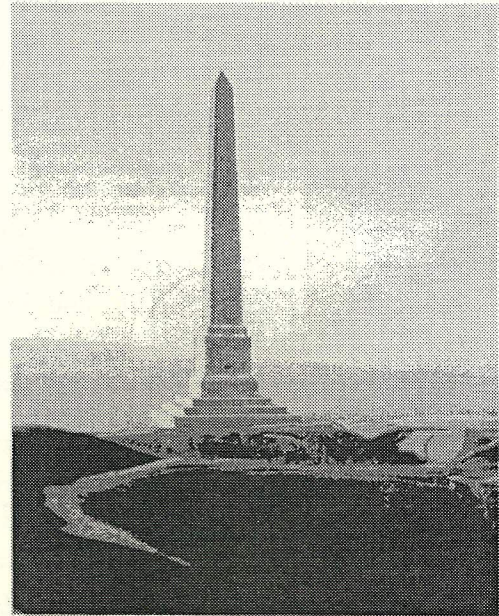
In this mailing you will also find a flyer about a special visit we are organising to Newman's Coffin Works in Birmingham on 16 October. This is what I hope will be the first of a number of excursions that members can be involved in and I hope a number of you will be able to join us on this occasion.

John Hooper

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THE OBELISK

*A Monumental Feature
in Britain*



Richard Barnes

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