

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

I WAS ENCOURAGED when I heard that Andrew Faulds, MP, had been moved to ask questions in the House concerning the implementation of Part 2 of the recent Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.

Though his questions did at least elicit the reply (*Hansard* 14th April, 1980) that the "first area (*sic*) of archaeological importance" would be designated "probably early in 1981" the answers were otherwise as unhelpful as might have been expected. We are told by the Secretary of State for the Environment that "Designations will be limited to a few areas of the highest archaeological significance under threat from development where it appears unlikely that co-operation from developers to enable archaeological access or excavations would otherwise be forthcoming."

This interpretation of the Act involves a major shift of emphasis which drastically reduces its potentially comprehensive coverage. Designation we learn is not only limited to a "few" areas of the "highest significance" but will be further confined to those areas in that category threatened by 'unco-operative developers'.

It is a matter of regret that the Act, far from being used as a general measure of protection for many of our historic towns and much of our ancient countryside, will be applied to a small—and probably insignificant — number of sites.

It is also questionable whether this restrictive view will allow the Act to be enforced at all. Experience surely suggests that in any area—urban or rural — archaeologists face a mixed bag of helpful and unhelpful developers. Will the government have either the firmness of purpose or the time to step in at the stage when a developer "proves" unco-operative? And assuming it does act, what will it do? Designate just the actual site, or the whole locality where many other developers might not fall into the 'unco-operative' category? Needless to say the government's answer does not make that clear.

If the government really does wish to clamp down on unco-operative developers I would suggest, ironically enough, that it begins with its own Department of the Environment because of their attitude to archaeological work on the site of Richmond Terrace, Whitehall. Despite the discovery in 1961, almost opposite, at Treasury Green, Downing Street, of what was claimed to be a Saxon Hall

(*Illustrated London News* June 29th, 1963) the Directorate of Ancient Monuments is unwilling to make a financial contribution to any trial work and has advised the developers, another branch of the Department of the Environment, the Property Services Agency, against a full excavation.

In April of this year, with demolition almost complete, and building due to begin in September, the Inner London Archaeological Unit, the team responsible for rescue archaeology in Westminster, was still without the permission necessary to get on to the site.

Indeed it took questions in the House, again from Andrew Faulds, before the PSA replied favourably to ILAU's request to be allowed access in order to undertake a preliminary investigation of the Richmond Terrace deposits. This can now, in theory, go ahead, though the Secretary of State confirmed in the Commons that "no government funds are available" (*Hansard* 18th April, 1980).

Consequently ILAU must try to finance the work on the government's own Westminster redevelopment within the environs of the Royal Palace of Whitehall, from its other, and more limited, resources. What a splendid moral example to those unco-operative developers in the private sector who might consider destroying archaeological deposits on their own sites because investigation could cause them delays or prove too expensive!

SUBSCRIPTIONS

IN FEBRUARY of this year the cost of printing *the London Archaeologist* was increased by 86 per cent. This was the first increase for nearly four years, so is roughly in line with inflation. During these four years there have been many other cost increases, especially for postage. We shall be using our price stability reserve to maintain our present price for three more issues (Vol. 3, nos. 14, 15, and 16—Spring, Summer and Autumn 1980) and to pay for the index to volume 3, but shall have to increase our price from Vol. 4, no. 1 (Winter 1980). This will be our first price increase for exactly four years, at a time of unprecedented inflation. The Publication Committee have decided that the new subscription rate shall be £2.60 p.a. and the price for single issues 65p. Subscriptions will be increased as they fall due, starting with the Winter issue. Readers who pay by Bankers Order are asked to give their bank plenty of time to make the necessary changes.