

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Valetta comes home to roost

IN THE LAST few days (I write in mid-June) I have been deluged by emails about something called the Valetta Convention; some condemning it as another example of European bureaucracy, and others more conciliatory. As I have been intending to write on this subject anyway, it is interesting to see the way in which it has been handled by different parts of the archaeological community.

To go back to the beginning: in 1969 the UK government (and twenty others) signed up to the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (the London Convention), an event which drew remarkably little attention at the time (or since). Times change, and in 1988 it was decided to revise the Convention to bring it up to date with changes that had taken place in both archaeology and planning. The revised Convention was opened for signature in January 1992 at a conference on Malta (hence its name), and ratified by the UK government on 20 March 2001. One might question why it took over nine years to do so, but that's another story.

As the Convention runs to 18 Articles, it is not possible to even summarise them all here, and I will just mention some highlights. If you have access to the internet, you can find the details on <http://www.archaeology.co.uk/valetta>. Many of the requirements are already met by existing legislation, but according to English Heritage the following changes would be needed:

1. widening the definition of 'monument' to enable scheduling to be applied to classes of site, such as Palaeolithic occupation sites, that are currently excluded,

2. making it a statutory requirements for local authorities to keep Sites and Monuments Records (it may come as a surprise that this is not already a legal requirement).

So far so good. The furore has been caused by Article 3, paragraph ii of which requires destructive techniques to be carried out by qualified, specially authorised persons. It is explained that this does not mean that members of the general public cannot be engaged on excavations, but that they must be under the control of a qualified person who is responsible for the excavation. This has been read by some as an attempt to exclude amateur groups from excavation, although much will depend on whether, and how, this Article is interpreted into British law. The latest news is that the Council for British Archaeology is preparing a document on the way forward regarding the implementation of the Convention. We hope that they will be able to achieve broadly-based support.

MoLAS moves

AS REPORTED in our previous issue, the Museum of London Archaeology Service has now moved from Walker House to its new premises in Eagle Wharf Road, which have been named Mortimer Wheeler House; details of the address are on p. 264. The phone numbers are unchanged.

Wot no colour?

WE APOLOGISE for the absence of colour from the inside of this issue; there were simply not enough colour illustrations available to justify the extra expense. Instead we have spent the budget on four extra pages of text, enabling us to clear a backlog of book reviews that had built up over recent months.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE THIRTY-SECOND A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Tuesday 16 May at the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. The following officers were elected: Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editor, Märit Gaimster; Secretary, Monica Kendall; Advertising and Promotions, Roy Stephenson; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, David Gaimster. Simon O'Connor-Thompson, the retir-

ing Secretary, was thanked for his work. Stephen Miller was re-elected as Auditor. New members representing City of London Archaeological Society and Hendon & District Archaeological Society were elected to the Publication Committee. The accounts showed a healthy surplus for the year. After the close of business, Dr. Frank Meddens of Pre-Construct Archaeology spoke on 'Narrow Street, Limehouse: pits, privies and privateers'.