

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Antiquities Legislation

AFTER years of discussion and rumour, firm proposals for new "Antiquities Legislation" have recently been published¹. It has been apparent for some time that new legislation is required to replace the hodge-podge of measures, many of 1913 vintage, which at present afford some protection to our Ancient Monuments. I welcome the recognition that a complete overhaul is needed, but am concerned that the new legislation should be effective, since it will provide the legal framework for a whole generation of rescue archaeologists. If we do not "get it right" this time there may be little of our archaeology left by the time its turn comes round again in Parliament.

Three of the four main measures are directly concerned with Ancient Monuments as commonly understood — the introduction of a system similar to the "listed building consent" procedure for proposals for work affecting Ancient Monuments, the provision for compulsory purchase, and the improving of public access. These should go some way towards affording the sort of protection that this part of our national heritage deserves.

The fourth proposal is the most radical and the most worthy of comment. It enables the DoE or local authorities to designate "areas of archaeological importance", within which "competent bodies" could apply for the legal right to observe and record during demolition and redevelopment, or to excavate a site for up to 4 months prior to development, and for grants to do so. In principle this is fine, but being enabling legislation its effectiveness will depend on the Secretary of State's and local authori-

ties' zeal in designating archaeological areas. Also, I can see the following weaknesses:—

(i) 4 months is not long enough for many sites. More flexibility is needed, with a maximum period of a year, depending on the complexity of the site and depth of deposits,

(ii) there could be a loophole in the definition of a site. If a large area is developed gradually over several years, as part of one master plan, is it one site or many? If one, some parts of it could still be inaccessible long after long after the statutory period of excavation had passed.

(iii) it is proposed to make funds available "on request" as the need arises. How will this affect the long-term viability of the Units, who need something better than a mere hand-to-mouth existence if they are to be truly "competent bodies"?

(iv) no provision is made for archaeological rights outside designated areas. Could not the legal right to observe and record be made general, even if the right to excavate has to be restricted to designated areas?

These proposals are only at a consultative stage, and it may be some time before they appear before Parliament. We must use this opportunity to make sure that the eventual legislation really does provide an adequate legal framework for rescue archaeology.

1. **Proposals to amend the Laws relating to Ancient Monuments: a Consultative Document.** Free from the Ancient Monuments Secretariat, Room 311, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 2HE (01-734 6010 ext. 143). Comments are called for by 22 April.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

THE ANNUAL meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will take place on Friday, May 20th at 7.00 p.m. in the Lecture Room of the Museum of London.

This year the lecture (open to the public) will be "The Museum of London," by Mr. Ralph Merrifield.

Prior to the lecture, the annual report and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers and also the election to the

Publication Committee of the six local society representatives, whose nominations should be made in writing not less than 14 days before the A.G.M. to the Chairman, Montague Chambers, Montague Close, S.E.1.

Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers to the A.G.M.; individual subscribers to the magazine and their friends will also be welcome to attend.