

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

An arrival is announced

IT WAS FORTUNATE that April 1st fell this year on a Sunday: the press conference marking the launch of the new Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England had to be held on a less inauspicious day — Monday 2nd. I shall let the Commission introduce itself:

The Commission has been established under the terms of the 1983 National Heritage Act as a body grant-aided by Government but independent of it. It has been charged by the Government with “securing the preservation of historic sites in England”, promoting and enhancing preservation activities in conservation areas and “promoting public enjoyment and advancing knowledge of ancient monuments, historic buildings and their preservation”.

As from April 1984 the Commission — English Heritage as it will be widely known — takes over responsibility for some 400 monuments in England currently open to the public. These include Stonehenge, Dover Castle, Kenilworth Castle, Rievaulx Abbey, parts of Hadrian's Wall and the Iron Bridge at Coalbrookdale. It will provide educational facilities at sites, carry out research and keep records. It is also has broad policy responsibilities for all monuments and historic sites and the listing and protection of monuments. The Commission will give grants for historic buildings, whether owned by individuals, local Government or other bodies, ancient monuments, historic gardens, conservation areas and rescue archaeology in England.

Much of this was previously the work of the former Ancient Monuments Board and Historic Buildings Council which advised the Department of the Environment. The former Chairmen of these bodies, Sir Arthur Drew and Jennifer Jenkins, are now Commissioners for the new organisation and their work will carry on within the Commission's new committees.

The Commission consists of a Chairman, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, creator of the National Motor Museum at Beaulieu and founder President of the Historic Houses Association, a deputy Chairman, HRH the Duke of Gloucester, and up to sixteen other members. The Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment and represent a very wide range of expertise

in areas ranging from archaeology (Professors Rosemary Cramp and Colin Renfrew), architecture and conservation to the management of historic houses, publications, tourism and marketing. The Chief Executive is Peter Rumble, previously director of the Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings Directorate.

The Government is making £52 million available to the Commission in its first year and this will be supplemented by funds the Commission will itself raise from admissions and sales at sites in its care. These are expected to contribute £2.4 million in 1984-85 making a total budget of £54.4 million. The Commission will broadly continue the pattern of work and expenditure previously carried out by the Department of the Environment but will look also to sponsorship and other initiatives to raise additional funds. These will be used to assist major new presentational and related projects.

One immediate consequence is the launching of the English Heritage membership scheme (an enhanced successor to the D.o.E. season ticket). For £12 — half price for children under 16 and senior citizens — English Heritage members will receive free admission to all sites until January 1986 together with the presentation booklet for the launch of English Heritage, a map and details of sites, and a special founder membership certificate. Ordinary membership will be £8 annually.

The “free admission” will be part of a package of activities designed to build up a mass membership and involvement in English Heritage. There are plans for a newsletter for members, and a children's membership group, KEEP. In due course special events and competitions to involve young people will be announced.

Members of English Heritage will also get an opportunity to join local groups aiming to improve presentation and amenities on sites near where they live. These “Friends Groups” will be part of a programme designed to give a “new look” to many of the monuments, including sponsorship by business and the local community. Founder membership of English Heritage will be available from English Heritage FREEPOST, 20-24 Lonsdale Road, London NW6 2YP — enclosing name and address and £12 (£6 juniors/senior citizens).