

political and moral aspects of the problem were thus not referred to the official reply.

In the written answer to the Commons Mr Ray Whitney, the foreign Office minister, emphasised that:

"The trustees are prohibited by statute from disposing of the sculptures, and new legislation would have to be passed by Parliament for this position to be altered."

In a press release Mr Norman Buchan, M.P., Shadow Spokesman on the Arts, replied to this by saying:

"This is a shameful and in many ways a mean minded statement from the Government. ... The implication is given that because the Law says that they have been gifted to the Trustees of the Museum in perpetuity, then somehow we are inhibited from acting.

This is of course a nonsense, and indeed we have a precedent. In 1972, in order to enable museum charges to be imposed the Government brought in a Bill, "The Museums and Galleries Admission Charges". The problem the Government faced was that many bequests, and in particular the Erskine of Torrie bequests, had been on the basis that the collections should be exhibited free to the public. Accordingly, the National Gallery of Scotland, the National Museum of Antiquities

of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum could not charge admission unless the Bill was passed. The Government promptly passed the Bill."

In their reply to the press, The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, also emphasises the weakness of any argument based on reference to legislation. They say:

"The legislation referred to by the Government in its reply, ... , was passed by Parliament and can be set aside by Parliament. Museums in many countries, bound by equally strict regulations, have found means of returning objects of central cultural importance to their claimant countries."

and they further stress that:

"But our case does not rest on this point. We believe the request for the return of the Marbles to be just for two reasons: they occupy a central position in the cultural heritage of Greece and are potent symbols of the Greek people's link with its own past; and they were forcibly removed from one of the most splendid monuments of mankind, of which they had formed an integral part for more than two thousand years". The debate surrounding the Parthenon Marbles has obviously not been resolved by the Governmental reply, and future discussions surely will have to focus on other aspects than mere legislation.

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### The New Commission

From April this year the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission takes over most of the responsibilities for the nation's heritage that were previously the charge of the Department of the

Environment's Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. At first sight that may seem purely an administrative matter, but it is likely to prove of vital importance for British Archaeology.

Its terms of reference relate to England only. The present administrative arrangements for Scotland, where responsibility lies with the Scottish Development Department (advised by the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland) remain unchanged. Wales comes off worst, with an uncertain fate for its monuments which, rumour has it, may be lumped in with the concerns of the Welsh Tourist Board. But whatever success the new Commission has in England is certain to be noted in Scotland and Wales, and its policies for Archaeology, including Rescue Archaeology, are likely to set the pace for Britain as a whole. What we are discussing is the future of Public Archaeology in Britain.

The Commission may not interpret its responsibilities in quite those terms, however. The Commissioners (up to seventeen in number) will meet monthly, under the Chairmanship of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, with HRH the Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as Deputy Chairman. It has two professional archaeologists in its present membership (Professor Rosemary Cramp and your correspondent), as well as the Chairman of the present Ancient Monuments Board, Sir Arthur Drew. The Board ceased to exist on 31st March, but is succeeded by a statutory Advisory Committee on Ancient Monuments, also chaired by Sir Arthur Drew, which will undoubtedly be stocked with such archaeological heavyweights as were members of the AM Board (e.g. Professor Barry Cunliffe, Dr. Peter Fowler, Sir David Wilson). Historic Buildings have always been the other main concern of the Directorate (some would say the first concern) and there is an equivalent Committee on Historic Buildings, chaired by Mrs. Jennifer Jenkins, Chairwoman of the Historic Buildings Council which replaces it. The majority of the Commissioners are not, however, pro-

fessional archaeologists or historians or architects: they are eminent in different ways, some in the field of finance and marketing, but also in local government and in conservation. It was the principal aim of Mr. Michael Heseltine who, when Secretary of State for the Environment, proposed the new Commission, that it should encourage 'entrepreneurial flair', being freed of the supposed shackles of government and Civil Service bureaucracy. In its independent status it will have much more freedom to develop the sites in its care in a more commercial and perhaps more popular way.

The Commission was not given much time to plan for the transition -- effectively from last November. Its first concern must be to achieve a smooth changeover in taking over the management of the 400 monuments in England which are in state care, as well as the working of the Ancient Monuments legislation (including Rescue Archaeology). Two key posts are effectively unchanged: Mr. Peter Rumble, the new Chief Executive, was the Director of the former administration, and Mr. Andrew Saunders remains the Chief Inspector. Fortunately, most of the Inspectorate (the professional archaeologists of the Commission) are also transferring across from the Department of Environment.

What difference, then, will all of this make? Initially, the main change will be in the presentation of the 400 monuments in the Commission's care and open to the public. (The Royal palaces, such as the Tower of London and Hampton Court, were not transferred and remain in the care of the Department of the Environment). Much thought and energy is being given to strengthening public awareness of these sites and to ways of making them more enjoyable to visit. Working parties on education, on presentation and on

marketing have been meeting to consider new approaches. The name 'English Heritage' has been given to the new enterprise, and better display and better information (including publications) are to be expected for the monuments, although not immediately. There is a real intention to make these sites more popular, along with a concern that they should continue to give pleasure to the seriously interested visitor.

In the longer term, the greater independence and freedom of action of the new body is likely to have considerable impact upon the development of Rescue Archaeology. This will be seen more clearly in relation to the estimated half million archaeological sites in England. There is a growing recognition that the most satisfactory strategy is one which will preserve such sites, making rescue excavations unnecessary. But at the same time, the pace of destruction through various agencies, not least the widespread application of deep ploughing, has created what some of us believe to be a real crisis and one to which no satisfactory solution has yet been found. The Commission is responsible for the administration of the ancient monuments legislation: for recommending the scheduling of monuments, for advising on scheduled monument consent (when the owner wishes to bring about a change of use of the land or to develop the site) etc.; and I certainly hope that the legislation can be made to work more effectively than in the past. But that protection can only be extended to the monuments which are placed upon the schedule, and those will always be a minority. The monuments in guardianship -- that is to say actually in the care of the Commission, and in most cases open to the public -- in turn represent only a small proportion of those that are scheduled. The Secretary of State announced, when

the formation of the Commission was under discussion in Parliament, that this was not a cost-cutting exercise, and one of the first decisions of the new Commission was to protect the Rescue Archaeology budget. A committee has been set up under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Drew, and will be reporting soon, to think about the way the Commission should deal with its responsibilities to ancient monuments. Rescue Archaeology is one of the responses. But major revolutionary changes should not be expected.

One of the Commission's urgent needs is for better information concerning all those sites which are known to exist: here there is the risk of some overlap with the Royal Commission of Historical Monuments for England (RCHM). This body has for a very long time been charged with the responsibility of making an inventory of the nation's monuments, and its main activities are survey and publication. At the time the new Commission (i.e. the Historic Building and Monuments Commission) was set up, it was clear that there would be some confusion between its name and that of the RCHM. The longer established body is the "Royal Commission", the new one just "the Commission", or "the HBMC". What remains to be seen is whether the overlap in the names will be followed by comparable overlap in their concerns and duties.

The cynic may suspect that, despite the good intentions of the Commission, commercialism will dominate, and that the acute problems presented by the 500,000 or so archaeological sites in England -- too many to protect effectively -- will not be given the attention they deserve. The optimist will feel, on the contrary, that, freed from the sometimes heavy hand of government, more coherent policies for the nation's archaeology may emerge.

One thing is certain. Adequate support for Rescue Archaeology will only develop from a real public demand for it -- from an awareness of its goals and from a real interest in its achievements. The Commission will respond to that, but it is largely up to the archaeologists to communicate their aims and their findings and the interest and importance of the

enterprise. The Commission will respond to public interest -- to market pressure. It is now, more than ever before, important that we see that our role as archaeologists is not only to reconstruct the past, but to ensure that people know about it, and want to know more.

Colin Renfrew

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