

Wild-life pays the price

By T.A. ENDE

KENT in south eastern England, is a beautiful county and is often referred to as "The Garden of England". Twice every 25 hours a "bulge" sweeps across the Atlantic Ocean and causes immense tidal activity when it reaches the "Continental Shelf" of Europe and turns into a current.

Today's tide coming up the English Channel meets the previous tide coming down the east coast off the North Foreland and this causes a rise and fall of the surface of the water in the Thames and Medway river estuaries of as much as 13 feet.

These tides sweep through London to its western extremity at Teddington, each time registering a rise and fall of the river and we are reminded of this by a place of alcoholic and other refreshment called "The Tide's End".

Corresponding to the phases of the moon there are "spring tides" and "neap tides" and from the map it can be seen that the Kent "flats" are exposed at low water. Beneath their surface live lugworms, ragworms, and clams and on their surface live cockles, mussels, winkles, whelks and oysters. In the mussels are found tiny pearls.

Gulls and snipe tread busily in their search for the sustenance the flats yield to them, and when I heard the snipe calling to one another as they flew over the housetops by day and by night, it seemed to me that, unlike the gulls, the snipe live rather by reference to the tides than to the movements of the sun. When the flats are covered, flounders and crabs leave muddy trails, and those crabs which have not a protective shell on their backs retire into whelks' shells for protection.

The salt marshes adjoining the flats are covered during the "spring tides" and once a year become ablaze with white and pink "everlasting" flowers. Many square miles of salt marshland

• T.A. ENDE, who has owned property in five British counties, came out of retirement recently to arrange the sale of a slice of the Kent countryside. Here, he reflects on the fate of the birds and bees that get in the way of land speculation.



have been turned into agricultural land by building around then a "sea wall" with "dykes" or ditches to drain them of stormwater.

Most of the island known as "Sheppey" is salt marsh reclaimed from the sea but there are low hills along the north shore with red clay cliffs fronting the Thames Estuary. A number of building estates was laid out in this century and special railway trains brought purchasers to auctions held on the site.

Over a period of 20 years I located "lost" plot-holders on those estates, and sold the land purchased from them to local builders, in some cases with planning consents from the local authority and complete plans and all other consents for the erection of residential villas.

I EMERGED from retirement to bring into the market six plots of land with planning consent for the erection of three residential houses for the beneficiaries of the estate of their grandmother and their father bought in 1907 for £90 freehold. Each plot has a frontage of 20 feet and a depth of 140 feet. At that time the newly-laid-out estate was comprised of open fields.

Since then the foresight, energy, talent and labour of generations of men and women have put in a water supply, drainage, gas and electricity supplies; roads in many cases have been made up and smart residential property has been erected; parades of shops have arisen alongside elegant public houses and res-

taurants; schools, places of worship, and public libraries have appeared, and for those few families who have no motor-car, there are bus services, with special bus service facilities for schoolchildren.

I doubt if the beneficiaries of the estate comprised in those six plots or their predecessors in title have visited the site a dozen times since 1907, but after nine years' delay caused by local authority and Whitehall obstruction, with planning consent from the local authority for the erection of three residential houses on them, the site has been sold to a builder for £95,000.

Piling for the foundations will cost him £30,000 and when the road is made up, there will be £15,000 for road charges. These costs and the cost of building will be passed to the purchasers of the three houses. The site has been cleared of all foliage and a number of trees of 50 or 60 years' growth and all the wild life that goes with them have been ejected — birds, bees, butterflies will disappear and much underground life will also disappear beneath foundations and "tarmac".

In 1907 an agricultural labourer's wage was 15s. (75p) a week. Now it is £140 a week. This is a multiplication of 187 times the 1907 wage.

If you deduct £5,000 for the expenses of bringing the land into the market, £90,000 represents a multiplication of 1,000 times the price at which the land was bought. It is true that the vendors of the land will pay tax on the sale, but agricultural labourers also pay tax.

IN 1879, the American economist, Henry George, published *Progress and Poverty*, which swept the world and was translated into all the leading languages of the world.

In it he propounded as the

enigma of our times that manufacturing processes cheapen all the time, but poverty always marches with progress. He said that the cause of this is that the amount of wealth distributed to landownership always increases out of all proportion to that distributed to labour and capital until labour and capital can no longer unite on land to create wealth, and industrial depression follows.

He defined capital as "that part of wealth which is set aside for the production of more wealth or wealth in course of exchange". It includes buildings, plant, machinery, tools, stock, transport, agricultural boundary fencing and walls, agricultural estate roads and drainage, and of course "stock" includes livestock, seeds and manures.

The farmer grows the grain; the miller manufactures it into flour; the warehouseman stores and packages it, and distributes it to the retailer. Once produced to the customer, it becomes wealth in his hands but ceases to be capital, because it is no longer "in course of exchange".

Henry George wanted a welfare state within a free enterprise society. He divided government into two parts; political and social. Political government would today consist in the defence of the realm and the sea and airways; maintenance of a civil police force and the courts of justice, and suchlike matters and would be reduced to the absolute minimum necessary



• The site in Sheppey, Kent, where the butterflies will miss out

to maintain the common right of the public and the right of the individual to enjoyment of the Sovereign's peace and the laws of the land.

Social government would consist in doing for mankind the things which it is not practicable for mankind to do except on a collective basis, such as irrigation and drainage, local and trunk roads, railways, ports, aerodromes, education, public health generally, hospital treatment, libraries, registries, welfare of the aged and infirm and provision of open spaces and recreational facilities.

He recognised that for any sovereign State to provide such facilities would require great expenditure and that revenue would have to be raised to pay for them.

In his monumental speech delivered in 1882 at Delmonico's Restaurant in New York, Henry George is reported by the *New York Times* to have said: "I pro-

pose to abolish all taxation which falls upon the exertion of labor or the use of capital or the accumulation of wealth, and to meet all public expense out of that fund which rises, not from the exertion of any individual, but from the growth of the whole community".

He claimed that there are ultimately only three possible sources of revenue: rent for the use of land (excluding buildings); wages for labour (including salaries and directors' fees), and interest paid for the use of capital. He wanted to take rent as the sole source of revenue.

We have seen how, in Kent, landownership has been able to profit a thousand times from "the growth of the whole community".

A single tax on all landed property, charged on the occupier, whether freeholder or tenant, is borne by the freeholder alone or proportionately with any other person claiming under him who can exert a profit-rent against an assignee or under-tenant.

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be justified. One consequence seems to be that Soviet valuers of land tend to use a relatively small number of categories of land value".

IT WAS then on to Estonia for Collins, Cord and Tideman, where they instructed the politicians on the virtues of LVT as a tool for jump-starting the ailing economy.

An important day's session took place at the Estonian State Land Department whose head,

Tombet Tiits, proved to be extremely sympathetic to the fiscal reforms advocated by the Americans.

After hearing Tideman's comments on a draft of a land tax law for Estonia that his department had prepared, Mr. Tiits invited the American professor to develop an alternative draft - which he did.

In his report to the New York-based Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, which had partly funded the Soviet trip, Prof. Tideman states: "There is widespread interest in the Soviet

Union in taxing land. Some of that interest comes from people who understand the importance of not taxing buildings.

"Even without our encouragement, some implementation of taxes on land can be expected to occur. But those who are interested in taxing land care very greatly for the insights and support that Americans are able to offer.

"And our contacts in the Soviet Union can be expected to increase the extent to which land is taxed and to result in better land tax methods".