

# Claims to the Earth

By PAUL KNIGHT

*"In an age when death duties hit large estates a score of private landowners still own one ninth of the entire country."*



TWO recent articles in the *Weekend Telegraph* drew attention to Britain's largest land owners who are now, statistically speaking, losing ground to public agencies. The 336,000 acres of Britain's largest private land owner, the Duke of Buccleuch, look quite small beside the 2½ million acres of the Forestry Commission. As the large land owners say, however, "acres, of course, are absolutely meaningless." One peer said he knew a man with 100,000 acres in the Highland, but "except for about three fields round the home farm it might as well be at the bottom of the sea."

Many of those with vast highland acreages would no doubt feel happier with the holdings of the large owners around Westminster, where urban land values are very near their peak.

The large central London area owners include:

Church Commissioners	700 acres
Duke of Westminster	300 acres
Howard de Walden Estates	100 acres
Portman Estates	100 acres
Earl of Cadogan	90 acres

From the articles it would appear that a new system of estate management for the large estates is developing through necessity. Death duties have resulted in the sale of much land, although the residue in the sale is often quite valuable if managed efficiently. The Earl of Lonsdale, for example, inherited in 1953 40,000 acres of farmland and about 45,000 of commons on which death duties had been assessed at £1½ million in 1944. Further duties of £600,000 were assessed and 14,000 acres were sold. By 1958, however, he was out of the red, having employed young men to help him to manage his grazing and broiler chicken business. It has been estimated that today the remaining estate is worth more than the original estate in 1944.

Urban estate holders have adopted more far-sighted policies for preserving their holdings against death duties. Lord Cadogan has established a trust to protect his ninety valuable acres by giving his estate away to his grandchildren although he still retains a few properties personally. Colonel Joseph Weld in Lulworth, Dorset, has done the same thing with most of his 11,000 acres estate, but he has an income of nearly £12,000 a year from a car park and a caravan site which he has retained.

The 1,842 fellows, associates and students of the Chartered Land Agent's Society manage about ten million acres of property between them. The income of this land is undisclosed. The Church Estates Commissioners, however, have a net annual income of about £16 million. For those who think that the yield of a site-value

tax would not be very great, a little more research into the annual value of land held by the largest land owners would soon allay their erroneous conclusions. A start could be made by assessing the value of the land holdings listed below:

Public land owners	acres
Forestry Commission	2,500,000
Ministry of Defence	622,000
National Coal Board	300,000
Crown Estates	274,000
National Trust	270,000
British Railways	250,000
Nature Conservancy (Scotland)	180,000

#### Large private land owners

Duke of Buccleuch	336,000
Countess of Seafield	187,000
Grosvenor Estates	175,000
Church Commissioners	160,000
Duke of Sutherland	160,000
Countess of Sutherland	160,000
Duchy of Cornwall	137,000
Duke of Atholl	120,000

#### The hundred thousand acre club

Earl of Cawdor  
Lord Burton  
Duke of Argyll  
Col. Cameron of Lochiel  
Andrew Eveleigh de Moleyns

(all of whom own at least 100,000 acres)

### LAND PRICES ON THE MOVE

ACCORDING to a correspondent in *Property*, the investment potential of the cosmopolitan area of the East Caribbean, stretching from Lesser Antilles and including Antigua, the Virgin Islands, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and Nevis, has yet to be appreciated by the British public.

With cheaper air fares, currency restrictions and more people chasing the sun each year, these islands are likely to become the playgrounds of the century for both holidaymakers and international land speculators. With prices for half acre beach front lots reaching £2,000, only the wealthy can stand the risk. Property values are rising steadily and 100 per cent appreciation on beachland has not been unusual.