

The Yardstick

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The two per cent solution

In 1996, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce said, "It is regrettable that those who appreciate the myriad benefits of closer cooperation between European nation states are losing ground in the debate because of such annoying irrelevances as compulsory metrication". Given the slimness of its 2% majority, one wonders whether the Leave Campaign would have won the EU referendum, had it not been for metrication and similar intrusions into private life that agitated so many of the general public. Readers will recall from BWMA's 2015 publication *Ministers' Metrication Conspiracy* that metrication was necessary to get Britain into the EC; how apt might it be that metrication got it out.

EU supplementary indications

At time of writing, there is no update on the review into non-metric supplementary indications within the EU, but the EC's Policy Coordinator for Legal Metrology Zsuzsanna Dákai wrote to BWMA on 15 January 2020: "The study by the consultants (including Deloitte) is currently being finalised. It will serve as a basis for the report the Commission is to make to the Council and the European Parliament. It is only the Commission report which can make recommendations. Should those recommendations suggest legal changes, it will be necessary to prepare, after the Report is presented to Council and Parliament, a legislative proposal which will need to go through the usual consultation procedure".

Metric downsizing - Christmas Puddings

During December 2019, Christmas Puddings at Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and elsewhere were reduced from 454 grams, the metric equivalent of 1 lb, to 400 grams. A photo comparison of the Tesco switch is on the BWMA website. A report will be in *The Yardstick* in due course.

Dave Stephens – 15 years

Fifteen years have passed since butcher Dave Stephens died, aged sixty, on 15 April 2005. Dave, who with his wife ran Mandy's Chop Shop in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, was the first trader to be served an infringement notice for using imperial units. As metric regulations came in, in January 2000, Dave said, "This is our first day of opening and we are sticking to imperial measurements, pounds and ounces. We are not adopting the European measurements of kilos and grams, and I have got the support of 3,000 signatures from the people of Leigh. We are going to put the lion back into Great Britain". In tribute to Dave, we reproduce a feature from the *Daily Mail*, from February 2000.

John Gardner, Director

BWMA is a non-profit body that exists to promote parity in law between British and metric units. It enjoys support from across Britain's political spectrum, all manner of businesses and the general public. BWMA is financed by subscriptions and donations. Membership is £12 per year. Sort code 20-68-79, Account 60547255. Cheques/POs payable to "BWMA", 29 Chart House Road, Ash Vale, Surrey GU12 5LS

Letter from BWMA's Director to the Prime Minister, 12 January 2020

Dear Prime Minister

Referring to imperial units, you said in an interview with the *Daily Mail*, published 7 December 2019,

“We will bring back that ancient liberty. I see no reason why people should be prosecuted ... I think the reality is a lot of people are now educated in the metric system, we have to recognise that. But people, I understand, know what a pound of apples is. I also understand what a kilo of apples is. There will be an era of generosity and tolerance towards traditional measurements”.

You will recall that the Labour Government's original decision to approve metrication in May 1965 was made with the assurance that the process was voluntary. When it became clear by the late 1970s that the retail trade was volunteering *not* to use metric, the Government resorted to compulsory measures. But the use of compulsion was halted in the House of Commons in 1978 and metrication orders for weighed out foods and loose goods were withdrawn.

The following year, the incoming Conservative Government made a commitment to preserving the use of imperial units. The Metrication Board was wound up in 1980 and, in 1985, the Weight and Measures Act recognised both imperial and metric measures. That should have been the end of the matter.

But Britain's membership of the European Community reversed British policy; EC Directive 80/181 caused the removal of authorised imperial units in 1995 and 2000, resulting famously in the criminal prosecution of Sunderland greengrocer Steven Thoburn. According to the appeal court judge, Lord Justice Laws, “What sticks in the craw of a lot of people is that an ancient and treasured way of doing things can be got rid of without an act of Parliament”.

Since compulsory use of metric units stems from European Union membership, designed to enforce compatibility within the EC bloc, there can be no reason, let alone justification, for metric compulsion to be continued once we have left the EU. The prohibition on imperial units should be lifted completely and immediately.

Previous governments have placed importance on the use of one system only, for reasons of price comparison; if that is to remain the case, it follows

that the Government must de-authorise metric units for weighed out foods and goods.

But we do not believe that is necessary; successive governments have vastly under-estimated the ability of consumers to make their own choices, and equally under-estimated the ability of retailers to form consistent market practices in response. Units of measurement are most effectively chosen by the people that use them, and metric and imperial units can find adoption where each system has merit, without the burden of legal imposition, and without the Government risking unpopularity with the public.

This will finally free trading standards authorities to concentrate on their correct role of protecting consumers from fraud and inaccuracy, rather than policing *which* weights and measures consumers and traders use.

We urge that the Government makes a statement that the drive for a metric-only society is being brought to a formal close, and makes the necessary changes in legislation.

Yours sincerely, etc.

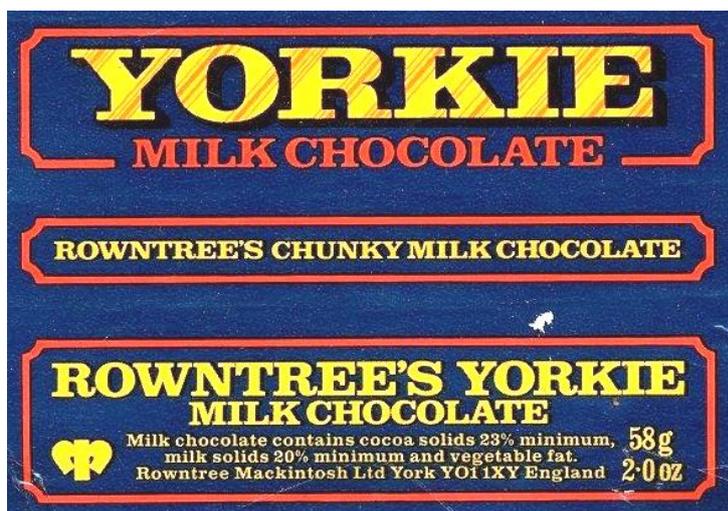
Not having heard back by the end of February, a reminder was sent, prompting the following brief reply from the 10 Downing Street Direct Communications Unit, 2 March 2020

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter of 12 January 2020. The Prime Minister very much appreciates the time you have taken to write to him.

As the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has responsibility for the matters you raise, I am forwarding your letter to them so that they are aware of your approach to this Office. Thank you, once again, for writing.
[Signature] Correspondence Officer

The reply states that, although the letter is being forwarded to BEIS, this is to make them “aware” of our approach to Number Ten. This *suggests* the matter is still being considered by Number Ten, but the letter gives no further details.

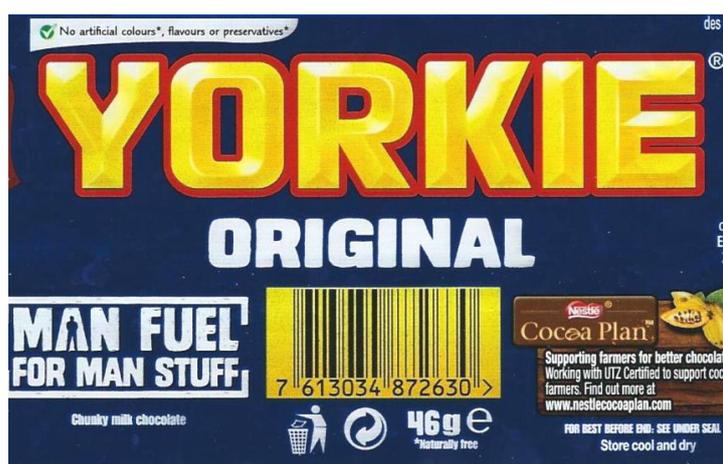
Readers are encouraged to write to their Members of Parliament, to urge that they support decriminalisation of imperial weights and measures for use by the retail trade. MPs may be reached at:
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.



As it was: the Yorkie bar to the left is undated, but is probably pre-1990; it weighed two ounces exactly:



As it is: the metric Yorkie weighs 46 grams, or 1.6 ounces, a reduction of 21%.



BWMA letter to British Parking Association, 22 February 2019

It has come to our attention that some car park entrance signs display height restriction in only metric units (i.e. the metre and centimetre). Please be aware that such signs are unlawful, and we would like to clarify legal matters to car park operators via the British Parking Association.

Vehicular height, width and length restriction signs are governed by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016. Prior to 2016, only imperial was required (i.e. feet and inches). Since 2016, newly installed restriction signs have to be in imperial and metric (although pre-2016 imperial-only signs may remain in place until they reach the end of their life).

Yet, signs at car park entrances are often metric-only. We believe the confusion arises from an erroneous distinction between public and private land. In terms of the Traffic Regulations, there is no distinction between public and private roads, since roads are defined in law as “any length of highway or of any other road to which the public has access” (Road Traffic Act 1984, section 142). Thus, the Traffic Regulations apply to privately owned roads used by the public, as well as roads maintained at public expense.

The inside of a car park is arguably not a road or highway, since a motorist has to buy a ticket to enter, thereby entering into a private contract; the motorist does not just drive through the car park and out the other side. But the sign at the car park entrance – on the public side of the barrier and facing the general traffic – remains part of the highway, regardless of whether it is on private land.

Please also bear in mind that non-compliant signs represent a financial risk, in that car park operators may be liable in the event of a compensation claim, should a vehicle be damaged.

In summary, height restriction signs at car park entrances are subject to the same legal regime as bridges, and cannot be metric-only. New signs must be in both imperial and metric. Imperial-only signs prior to 2016 may remain until replaced.

We hope this letter is of assistance. When metric signs are unlawfully placed, our Association, a non-government organisation that campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, is obliged to see that they are removed. This is both costly and inconvenient. We would much rather non-compliant signage be averted, and hope this letter increases awareness of the law in this area.

Measure for Measure

by Roger Scruton

Published in the *American Spectator*,
7 February 2011

Since 1995, under pressure from the European Union, our Land Registry in Britain has been measuring land areas in hectares, rather than acres. As from now the acre is no longer protected as a legal measure, and all transactions in land must be conducted in hectares. The European Commission has not banned the acre: but it has not needed to, since it has pushed the British people into a corner where their ancient way of measuring and parceling out land no longer has any real legal standing. This is one part of the ongoing abolition of England, and it offers me an occasion to reflect on the meaning of weights and measures, and on what first inspired the comprehensive decimal system that is now uniform across Europe.

It began in France at the Revolution, when the decimal system was proposed as uniquely rational, proof that people were able to organize their lives according to Reason rather than Custom. The meter and the centimeter, the franc and the centime, the liter and the centiliter, the hectare and the square meter were henceforth to replace all the old weights, measures, and currencies that had reminded the French of the unexamined ways by which they had lived. Even the clock had to be decimalized, with 10 hours to the day, 100 minutes to the hour, and so on. The Revolutionaries stopped short of decimalizing the months, but were clearly deeply frustrated that they could not boss the moon about as effectively as they could boss the earth.

From the mathematical point of view there is nothing sacrosanct about the decimal system, which owes its pre-eminence to our human fingers, rather than to any properties of the number 10. As we now know, if there is a basic way of counting, on which all others depend, it is that of binary arithmetic, using the numbers 0 and 1. But what was offensive about the decimal system was not its arbitrariness. It was

its despotic intent. The decimal system did not evolve; it did not emerge by an invisible hand from the transactions of free individuals, as the old currencies and measures had emerged. It was imposed from above, by arrogant revolutionaries who despised what was customary and voluntary as a threat to their geometrical conception of society. Through changing the measures they hoped to change the world, binding the familiar transactions in an abstract yoke of pure mathematics.

You may think the exercise harmless. After all, Americans, who use yards and miles instead of meters and kilometers, and acres instead of hectares, began their independence with a decimal coinage — the dollar and cent, derived from the German thaler. But the old weights and measures persisted in America despite that innovation. Ounces, pounds, stones and bushels, pints, quarts, and gallons, rods and perches, and all the crazy derivatives of those fantastic measures have lasted here as they lasted back home in England. And why did they last? They lasted because they grew from the free transactions between people, because they were marked by human need and human interest, and because no meddling official had ever thought he had the right to change them.

A bushel of corn is just the amount that a single man can carry. A stone is 14 pounds, which is the maximum you can lift without strain. A pint is the amount that will quench the ordinary thirst, and a gallon - eight pints - the largest quantity that can be easily carried on a journey. A pound is 16 ounces, and so can be divided two ways, four ways, and eight ways in even portions. The natural contours of the human body and human relationships can be read in these measures at every point.

For in-built gentleness, nothing compares with the old English currency, still in use during my youth, and abolished under pressure from Europe when that cold fish Edward Heath decided (alas, probably rightly) that England would be better ruled by Brussels than by him. Since the days of King Alfred the Great it had

been established that the English pound — defined by weight — would contain 240 pence.

Why choose such a number? The simple answer is that 240 has eighteen whole number factors, besides itself and 1 — so that there are eighteen ways of dividing a pound among those entitled to a share of it. This is a currency designed for sharing and giving, unlike the decimal system (100 has only seven whole number factors, and 10 only two). And the principle of sharing and dividing penetrated our coinage from top to bottom.

The pound had 20 shillings, divided into four crowns. But we also divided again, so as to have the half-crown piece, worth two shillings and sixpence, since the shilling was divided into 12 pence (12 having four whole number factors besides itself and 1). Hence the half-crown and the two-shilling piece (the florin) lay side by side in our pockets, both of them heavier than any coin in circulation today.

The shilling was divided into the sixpence, the three-penny bit, and then the penny, which was in turn divided into the halfpenny, the farthing, and (though this coin was extinct in my youth) the mite. The array of sterling coins created a kind of compendium of human dealings. It suggested all the ways people could be linked by division and multiplication, rather than by the mean-minded addition and subtraction that define the decimal system.

Most wonderful of all was the coin that had vanished long before my time, but which was still retained as an item of accountancy — the guinea. This, equal to 21 shillings, had no other purpose than to define a booty in which there could be seven equal shares. Even today horses are bought and sold in guineas, maybe because those involved gang together in threes and sevens, or maybe because the word “guinea” is too closely associated with the horse in the legends of huntsmen and highwaymen.

Our coinage remained unchanged for a century or more and Victorian pennies still circulated abundantly at the moment when the penny ceased to be “legal tender.” Silver coins survived from the reigns of Victoria, Edward VII, and George V, but they were made of real

silver, and therefore rare, since the metal was worth more than the coin (hence Gresham’s law, which tells us that “bad money drives out good”). Losing this precious part of our national life was hard for us, even if easy for Edward Heath. For it meant saying farewell to dealings that made threepence, sixpence, a shilling, two shillings, and then half a crown into thresholds, stages on the way to an agreement, in which we could exercise our social prowess and pause to take breath. Ours was an intricately social coinage that opened the way at every point to the concluding gesture.

Then came the European Directive in 2000, which abolished our ancient weights and measures, and which allowed our Parliament no right to consider the matter. Pounds and ounces, gallons and pints, bushels and stones — all those wonderful, irrational, but humanly intelligible measures were stolen from us. And for what? So that our markets could be “opened to competition,” and our customs “brought into line” — so placing a penalty on our economic life, forcing us to redesign all our scales and packaging, and abolishing all our local ways of doing things.

There was resistance for a while; one or two butchers and grocers were prosecuted. But we knuckled under, since no one in authority made a move to defend us. Our Parliament is a fiefdom of the political class; it knows on which side its bread is buttered, or rather its tartine est beurré. The great advantage of those top-down edicts from Brussels is that they confer on our politicians the right to be elected, without the duty to do anything in exchange for it.

Nevertheless, it still seems to me that our little farm, which we have worked for years to put together from abandoned scraps, is not 40 hectares of Europe, but 95 acres of England.

The above article is reprinted in tribute to Sir Roger Scruton, who died in January.

<http://www.roger-scruton.com>

Another piece by Sir Roger on metrication, “Stupidity beyond measure”, published first in *The Times* on 9 December 1999, is on the back page of *Yardstick 61*.

Dave the butcher's imperial crusade

Daily Mail, 4 Feb 2000

Dave Stephens' butchers shop brings back memories of the High Street as it used to be. Outside, there is a red and white striped canopy and around the entrance blackboards advertise such delicacies as salt ox tongue, oven-ready rabbits, black pud and rump steak.

Inside, there are rows of other English fare; synthetic-looking custard tarts, apple pies with thick, dry pastry, fruit and meat mince pies, and endless jars of marmalade. All good British food, weighed out in traditional pounds and ounces, that no self-respecting, metricated European would touch.

And that's the way Dave and his wife Mandy, who run Mandy's Chop Shop in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, intend to keep it. This week, they began a single handed campaign to extricate the people of Britain, or England as they will call it, from the clutches of Europe.

Dave is a fat, jolly, red-faced man, so porcine in appearance that you couldn't really imagine him doing any other job. He was as happy as a pig in mud purveying meat to the public. But shortly before Christmas all that changed. He received a letter from the Government ordering him to change from imperial measures to metric on January 1st 2000. Failure to comply would mean confiscation of his scales, a £5,000 fine and possibly two years in prison.

'We are adamant we're not going to do it': he says. 'We will not pay any fines and we will not change our scales and we will defy anyone who tries to enforce that on us. We will take it to Europe as an affrontation (sic) to the English trader. We'll take it to the limit, even if that means prison.'

It would cost the couple about £3,000 to change over their scales, advertising and prices. But it is not the cost that is the problem. Dave's real concern is his customers. Many are elderly and he feels and they would be 'very confused' by finding steak priced at £2.99 one day and £7.50 a kilo the next. They might think he'd put the price up, which would be a breakdown of trust. Worse, he sees the end of his God-given right to yell, 'foive pahnd o' best pork sausages'. He knows that, in shops all over the country on January 1st, the small trader's cry of 'a pahnd a pahnd' will have died to appease the faceless bureaucrats of Brussels.

But to Dave, the pound is a symbol of life, liberty, patriotism and the English nationality, and he doesn't intend to let it slip through his fingers like a piece of wet tripe. 'We are English, this is an island and we are Anglo-Saxon,' he says. 'Why should everyone else have their nationality and their customs but not us? This is nothing to do with being bigoted. I am talking about basic English decency.'

The couple launched a petition in December and have collected 3,000 signatures from sympathisers. He seems to know all his customers, in the old long-

vanished English way. 'You never get a raw deal in here, only raw meat,' chirrups one old lady.

Dave's stand brought him to the attention of the UK Independence Party, which is anti-Europe. He was put in touch with a top barrister, Michael Shrimpton, who revealed that imperial measurement is still the law of the land, despite what the Government may advise. 'People just don't realise this,' he says. 'They are intimidated by the EU and just fall in line.'

Armed with this information, Dave took on John Humphrys, scourge of the politicians, on Radio 4's Today programme, betting him £10 that he was not breaking the law by refusing to convert his scales. Humphrys seemed abashed.

Last Thursday Dave and Mandy went to a council meeting and asked exactly when they were going to confiscate his scales and tills? He could get no answer. 'I shouted,' he says, looking fierce. 'The police were called and I was thrown out.'

Yesterday the couple were served with an 'infringement notice' from Southend trading standards department. 'It's D-Day,' says Dave, folding his arms across his giant trunk in its blue-striped apron. 'Now we are just waiting for them to try to enforce it.'

Dave was born in 1945 in East London and brought up in a two-up two-down with an outside toilet and a 'tinbarf'. His father was in the Army, then a postman for 27 years. But it is the generation before that which really impresses him. His two grandfathers suffered badly in the Great War. 'Great men,' he says. One was killed, but the other conquered ill health to father eight children and became a successful East End trader, buying and selling shops. 'He could turn his hand to anything,' says Dave, 'he was hard working and brave.'

He yearns for a return to the values of his childhood. 'Before the days of TV and computers people got together more,' he says. 'We really did used to sing songs round the piano. We also used to share with our neighbours. We had very little, it was hard, but you would give to people who had less than you did, a bit of tea, or butter. That was very important.'

While he is volatile, Mandy seems steady and serious, but they were drawn together by their love of people and a shared attachment to the vanishing concept of Englishness. 'I am all for the English people and for our culture,' she says. 'I can't see why we have to have so much unnecessary change. If pounds and ounces were good enough 300 years ago, why not now? I am for the public. I want what the customer wants, and I know they don't want kilos. I will go to prison if I have to. I haven't had a holiday for ten years and I would look on it as two years well-earned rest.'

Dave has more positive plans for the future. 'I intend to stand as an Independent MP for Southend,' he says. 'Do you think I'd do all right in the House of Commons in my apron?'

The Knot

by John Strange

As we all know, a right angle is divided into 90 degrees. Each degree is divided into 60 minutes in accordance with the sexagesimal system introduced by the Babylonians 4,000 years ago. The nautical mile is the distance between two points on the same meridian whose latitudes differ by one minute.

The Earth, however, is slightly flattened near the poles and so the nautical mile varies from very nearly 6,045 feet $10\frac{3}{8}$ inches at the equator to very nearly 6,107 feet $10\frac{1}{8}$ inches at the poles. The Admiralty decided that the nautical mile should be 6,080 feet which is correct at a latitude of about 48° .

So much for the theory. But why is a speed of one nautical mile per hour called a knot? In the old days, ships carried a supply of logs for the galley. To estimate the ship's speed through the water, a log would be thrown over the bows and timed till it passed the stern. The ship's length being known, the speed could then be calculated and recorded in the log-book.

The method involved a waste of logs. It was therefore decided that a line should be attached to the log so that it could be retrieved. The log was cast over the stern and the line allowed to run out freely for 28 seconds, a 28-second sand glass being used.

How far does a ship moving at one nautical mile per hour travel in 28 seconds? This is a rule-of-three calculation and the answer is very nearly 47 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. So that the length of the line that ran out did not have to be measured each time, knots were tied in it at intervals of 47 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; all that then remained to be done was to count the knots.

In the Lords: Baroness Ludford, Liberal Democrat, Spokesperson (European Union), 7 January 2020:

We will do our very best to make it the least worst Brexit, but the fact is that what the Government have already said and put in the draft Bill is making that prospect extremely difficult, on top of Brexit itself ... the only wry amusement that might emerge from the situation will be watching the tensions between the little England nationalists who want a nostalgic return to the 1950s, such as Charles Moore, who wants to go back to imperial measurements, the creative destruction of Mr Cummings, as he recruits weirdos and misfits to Whitehall, and the global, buccaneering Singapore-on-Thames that the hedge fund backers of Mr Johnson desire. It will be funny, if terribly sad.

Pharmaceutical Defence Ltd has issued guidance on the difference between milligrams and millilitres, Australian Journal of Pharmacy, 27 June 2019

"The colder weather sees a predictable increase in the prescribing of prednisolone oral liquid for children," observes PDL in a practice update. "Often these prescriptions are written by after-hours or hospital-based doctors and many will be handwritten. As dosages are typically based on the child's weight, the prescribed dose is frequently written in milliGRAMS instead of milliLITRES." PDL says that the seasonal increase in prescribing of this

medicine has historically led to more reports of this error, because the dose in milligrams has been mistakenly translated into millilitres. "This can lead to the patient receiving a dose of prednisolone five times prescribed because of the concentration of the available products," it says. It gives a case scenario in which an 11-month-old was prescribed prednisolone 10mg daily for three days. In this case, the directions were inadvertently recorded as 10ml, and dispensed with this dose. "The infant was given the higher dose by the parents and shortly afterwards started displaying symptoms of discomfort and agitation. The parents took the child to the local hospital where a doctor identified the incorrect dose. The doctor reassured the parents that there was no risk of long-term harm to the child and informed the pharmacy of the error ...

7 May 1983: letter from John Michell to the New York Times

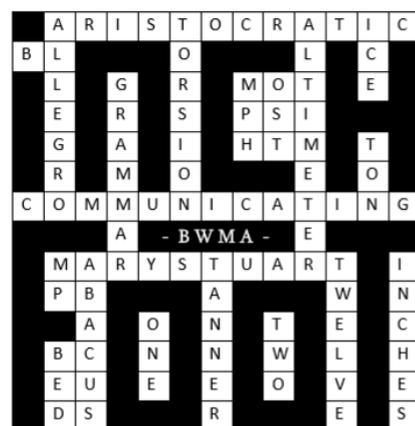
Your statement in an April 25 news article that "the United States is the only major country that has not yet officially adopted measurements based on a decimal system" reminds me of a claim repeated for many years by the British Metrication Board: The U.S. is committed to metric conversion, and Britain is in danger of being left as the only country still using customary measures.

Still, metrication proved so unpopular that an early act of the Thatcher Government was to abolish the Metrication Board. The metric initiative was officially abandoned because voluntary metrication had attracted few volunteers and mandatory metrication was recognized as politically inexpedient. At present, most British Government agencies and many large corporations use the metric system, while customary measures are retained for domestic and market use. Road signs are in miles, beer is served in pints and we buy vegetables by the pound. Since the metrication campaign ran out of steam, customary measures have been reasserting themselves. As long as there is freedom of choice, they are always likely to prevail over the less practical metric units.

Yards, Gallons and Golden Sovereigns

In 2018, BWMA produced a reprint of *Imperial Resistance*, newsletter of the Anti-Metric Society. The Autumn 1992 issue of that newsletter referred to the booklet *Yards, Gallons and Golden Sovereigns* by Hope Bourne. Anti-Metric Society supporter Robert Goodhand kept his copy, and recently made it available for the enjoyment of BWMA members; copy enclosed.

Answers to the last Yardstick's crossword:



Letter to the British Medical Journal

18 April 1964

SIR, What justification has Dr R. E. Smith (14 March, p. 695) for equating "past" with "wrong," and "old" with "bad," and what mandate from the British people have our powers-that-be for thrusting the metric system on us? The old Imperial system did at least evolve as a result of experience, while the metric is being imposed by planners; and however suitable the latter may be in the chemical laboratory, it is not appropriate for domestic or even medical practice use. Its overriding fault is the ease with which it is possible to make 1,000% errors by misplacing one dot, and I would remind Dr Smith of the children under treatment for ringworm by selenium who lost their lives shortly after the Kaiser's war through receiving a ten-times overdose; the same thing happened to the patient of a German doctor, who was injecting his varicose veins with a dose given as recommended in an article which by a printer's error was ten times what it should have been, the patient dying as a result.

I was taught 50 years ago that the metric scale of weights ran: kilogram, hektogram, dekagram, gram, decigram, centigram, milligram (microgram being a modern addition), and those names may have been designed by the original planners to minimize the likelihood of error through misplaced dot. If so, the planners displayed as much ignorance of human nature as they did of measurement when they based their measurement of length on a 40-millionth of the earth's circumference round the poles - and got it wrong. The human mind does not think in tenths, but in halves, quarters, dozens, and scores, and such measures as have character and individuality. There is one European country which offers its visitors wine in quantities of 2, 3, or 5 decilitres (I forget if it is Switzerland or Italy), but I have never heard a Frenchman ask for "Nought-point-five kilograms" of butter or anything else. If we must have a change, why not a duodecimal system, subdivisible by 2, 3, 4, and 6?

I for one find dispensing much easier with our Imperial system - for all its 437.5 grains to the oz - which is at least distinctive and easy to remember through its very oddity. The decimal metric system stands self-condemned by the sophistries and subterfuges adopted in Dr Smith's letter to try and make it workable - for example, 500 mg may be easier to grasp in practice, but it is not, as he contends, a correct metric measure; it should read "5 decigrams." The present chaotic muddle in dispensing mensuration is not due to faults in the Imperial system, but to the attempt to impose upon us a different system, for which we have not asked. I have questioned many drug travellers, and not one of them has been able to tell me who is behind this determined drive to thrust decimals upon us. I am, etc.

W. H. SPOOR, Liskeard, Cornwall

Letter, 9 May 1964 - SIR, Supporters of the metric system contend that it is wrong to prescribe a drug in a dose of 60 mg as this merely serves to perpetuate the Imperial system of measurement. But to reduce the dose by 17% to 50 mg, just to make dispensing easier, is to make nonsense of the art of prescribing. The reason why the majority of doctors and nurses continue to think in terms of the Imperial system is that the dose of a drug in this system has been worked out to meet the needs of the patient, and not the other way round. One is left with the impression that supporters of the metric system are more concerned with ease of dispensing than the therapeutic effect of the drug on the patient. And while the metric system is undoubtedly easier to use, this does not necessarily make it any safer. As Dr W. H. Spoor has pointed out (18 April) to misplace a decimal point can be more lethal than to confuse the signs for drachms and ounces. What is needed is an alteration in the size of the decimal point to make it so obvious that it cannot be misplaced. Or to use some other symbol altogether, which cannot be mistaken for anything else. I am, etc.

MASSEY DAWKINS, London W.1.

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