

# The Yardstick

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## Covid-1984

This *Yardstick* concludes our investigation into the government's handling of Covid-19 social distancing. In response to our Freedom of Information enquiries regarding how social distancing should be conveyed to the public (metric, imperial, or dual), the Department of Health and Social Care said, "we do not hold the requested information" (Yardstick 73); Public Health England said it "does not hold the information you have specified" (Y74); the Cabinet Office said "the information you requested is not held" (Y74); and a response has now been received from the Government Communication Service which has specific responsibility for communicating to the public: "this information is not held by the GCS".

If this lack of documentation is to be interpreted literally, it means no-one at any of these agencies considered the matter; no-one raised the question: "Wouldn't older people, you know, those not educated in metric, and most at risk from Covid19, wouldn't *they* prefer the use of feet and inches?"

To remind readers, the YouGov survey in 2015 (Y62) asked 5,191 adults, "If you were to estimate a short distance, which would you use?" 57% of respondents said feet or yards, and 36% said metres. Among those aged 60 or higher, the figures were 86% for feet or yards, and just 12% for metric.

We also received one letter from the DHSC (palmed off by the Prime Minister's Office; Y74) and, inside, a letter from the Cabinet Office, which says, "metres are the international standard unit of measurement for length. It is for this reason that social distancing guidance is communicated in metres".

## Decimalisation – 50 years

Accompanying this *Yardstick*, for members, is a 1967 newsletter from the Anti-Decimal Association, and other materials representing the resistance to the elimination of Britain's traditional coinage, half a century ago. Robert Carnaghan recalls: "On the morning of decimalisation day, I was interviewed live on the BBC's Radio 4 Today programme. I had to get up early but the BBC sent a chauffeur to collect me. I believe the interviewer was Michael Parkinson. A bright lad, 10 or 11 years old, was interviewed just after me to show how well he could cope with the new money".

## New Hon. Member - Jonathan Myles-Lea

We are delighted to welcome Jonathan Myles-Lea into BWMA's ranks as an Honorary Member. Jonathan is Britain's leading painter of country houses and gardens, and has created over eighty paintings in oils. His standard painting is 42" x 30", and his largest landscapes are seven feet in length. Readers can see Jonathan introduce his work on the New Culture Forum's channel on Youtube; search for: Jonathan Myles-Lea My Work As a Painter.

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

## Metric-only social distancing - Cabinet Office responses

The Government Communication Service failed to reply to the Director's email of 1 October 2020 (Yardstick 74). Since the GCS is part of the Cabinet Office, the Director, on 11 November, resurrected his September FOI request by asking for an internal review. And the Director had a further string to his bow: writing to his own MP Michael Gove, Minister for the Cabinet Office.

### Cabinet Office's response to request for Freedom of Information internal review, 10 December 2020

Thank you for your email of 11 November. You asked for an internal review of our response to your request for information of 3 September. In your request you asked for documents related to the decision to use metres as the unit of measurement for Covid-19 social distancing advice. In your Internal Review email, you requested that we review whether this information is held by the Government Communication Service (GCS).

I have carefully reviewed the handling of your request. As set out above, you asked us to focus our searches within the GCS. As part of the internal review process we have requested the GCS conduct a search for the information in scope of your request and I can confirm that this has been done and that no relevant information was held. I therefore consider that this information is not held by the GCS and that I should uphold the decision given in our letter.

I have also reviewed the advice given to you previously under section 16 of the FOI Act and consider that this was adequate. You may still wish to contact the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) who can be contacted at the following address: [sage@goscience.gov.uk](mailto:sage@goscience.gov.uk)

If you are unhappy with the handling of your request, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Rachel Anderson

### John Gardner's email to the office of Michael Gove MP, 6 November 2020

As well as being my constituency MP, I understand that Michael Gove is Minister for the Cabinet Office. I am conducting research as to why, when conveying "social distancing" to the public, the Cabinet Office failed to use imperial units alongside metric, despite surveys showing that most people use imperial rather than metric.

I sent a query to the Cabinet Office's Government Communication Service on 1 October. Although I had an auto-reply saying I could expect a reply within 5 working days, and despite me sending a reminder on 19 October, I've had no response, not even a holding reply. Could Michael Gove please look into this?

*The above email was accompanied by the said query to the GCS, as follows:* I understand that the GCS has been responsible for conveying government guidance to the public in relation to the Coronavirus. In the second half of March 2020, the Government decided upon social distancing of two metres. Please can you explain why GCS communicated this to the public as "two metres" without an imperial equivalent (such as "2 metres/6 feet"). Was the use of an imperial equivalent considered?

### Reply from Julia Lopez MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, 9 December 2020

Thank you for your letter of 17 November on behalf of your constituent, Mr John Gardner, regarding the use of metric measurements in Covid-19 public information campaigns. I am responding as Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office with responsibility for the Government Communication Service.

The International System of Units (SI) is used in most countries worldwide, including in the UK. Under this system, metres are the international standard unit of measurement for length. It is for this reason that social distancing guidance is communicated in metres.

Mr Gardner may be interested to view some of the most recent Covid-19 resources, which are publicly available at <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk>. These resources now focus on 'Hands, Face, Space', as opposed to a specific social distance. Please thank Mr Gardner for his email, and I am sorry that I have not been able to provide him the answer he is looking for on this occasion.

#### **BWMA comment:**

The link to 'Hands, Face, Space' leads to social media graphics, but no actual information that explains why a specific social distance that was drummed into the population in most of 2020 is now being de-emphasised.

Julia Lopez's reference to the metre as the "international standard" is irrelevant; what matters is *what people use*. Julia Lopez's reply reveals a degree of government detachment from the public that should not be possible. And she ducks the question as to why feet were not included alongside metric, for what is said to be health-critical information.

To achieve compliance with social distancing, the Cabinet Office relies on "social and behavioural interventions" advised by the Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviour (SPI-B) comprising mainly academics from universities. SPI-B's paper *Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures* (referenced in Yardstick 74) says that there are nine ways of achieving behaviour change: "Education, Persuasion, Incentivisation, Coercion, Enablement, Training, Restriction, Environmental restructuring, and Modelling".

Maybe so, but the government's use of behavioural science has all but replaced prior forms of social trust, such as the organic relationship between the English language, British measurements, and the British people.

Government institutions are indifferent as to why imperial units evolved in the first place: whereas one metre for social distancing might be too short, and two metres too long, imperial divisions allow feet to be used in place of yards, offering finer degrees of adjustment while keeping whole numbers. Thus, the government could have selected 'four feet' as a social distance, an option not possible with the metre without resorting to decimal points (i.e. 1.2 metres).

This raises yet another question: was two metres arrived at scientifically, or was it selected by the need for a *round number*? There is no way of knowing, since BWMA's FOI requests have produced no indication that the government thought about the matter, at all.

## “Passing distance” signs

Neil Hamilton, Senedd Member for Mid & West Wales, wrote the following to Gwynedd Council on 13 July 2020.

I have been sent the following link, which illustrates signage erected within your authority on a public road:



The measurements on the sign are solely in metric and I believe this is unlawful under current legislation, which requires distances to be measured in imperial, with a few exceptions such as low bridge regulations etc., where metric measures are permitted as a dual indicator.

I should be grateful if you could confirm the statutory authority under which these signs have been erected and, if unlawful that you will take steps either to replace the sign with imperial measures or supply a dual indication in imperial as well as metric.

The UK Government has long since ceased the drive to compulsory metrication and most people still use imperial measures for most weights and heights in common usage e.g. their own height and weight. Use of metric alone is confusing to many people and can create a hazard. Whilst imperial measures remain the basic standard in popular usage, local authorities should go with the grain of that popular usage for best effect. With best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you.

### Reply from Gwynedd Council, 15 July 2020

Thank you for your message. I can confirm that the Council received approval from the Welsh Government to install the signage.

It is accepted that road signs should normally include both imperial and metric measurements and this was discussed right at the start with Welsh Government transport officials. The feeling was that including 1.64 yards on the sign would not be as effective, and that a message of 1.5m is easier to understand. 1.5m is accepted as a safe measure in the passing of cyclists not only in the UK but also on the continent, Canada and the USA.

However, as this is a pilot scheme, the Welsh Government will no doubt consider any feedback when deciding on whether or not these passing distance signs should be given permanent permission.

Iona Hughes, ar ran/on behalf of Dilwyn Williams, Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive, Gwynedd Council

### BWMA followed up Neil’s letter with one of its own to Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy and Transport, Welsh Government, 3 August 2020

I write with reference to the “passing distance” 1.5m signs, featured recently in the news, and which we understand are part of a pilot scheme.

While our Association has no possible objection to the new signs as a safety initiative, we are much concerned with the use of metric units. The Traffic Regulations and General Directions 2016 *require* imperial units (only) for distance, and *both* imperial and metric for vehicle dimension restrictions. The use of metric-only traffic signs is unprecedented for distance road signs and introduces uncertainty into a statutory system.

Gwynedd Council has said that “*the Council received approval from the Welsh Government to install the signage*”. Our understanding, however, is that traffic signs are controlled at the UK level.

Please explain what is meant by “approved”; what legal instrument was used to install these metric signs, and why was Parliament and/or the Senedd not involved?

We remind the Welsh Government that feet are commonly used and understood in Britain; for instance, we use feet and inches to measure our own height. ‘Five feet’ and its Welsh translation will convey the desired distance more effectively than “1.5 metres”; and there is a risk that these signs, as presently constituted, may compromise, rather than promote, road safety.

Please give an assurance that the signs will be amended to use imperial units; and we look forward to your explanation as to the signs’ legal status.

### Reply from Network Management Division, Welsh Government, 10 September 2020

Thank you for your letter of 3 August to the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales. I have been asked to reply. Please accept our apologies for the delay in responding.

The Welsh Government is working with Gwynedd County Council on this trial and did authorise the signs. As you have highlighted, traffic signs in the UK should display only imperial or both imperial and metric units, depending on the circumstances in which they are being used.

Regrettably it was an oversight on our part to authorise in that respect, but we do retain the powers to do so. Under the auspices of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended, the Welsh Ministers have the powers to authorise the erection of a sign of another character, not prescribed by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016.

However, this is a trial and if the decision is made to roll out the signs nationwide, both metric and imperial units will be displayed.

Richard Morgan, Head of Planning, Asset Management & Standards, Network Management Division

## The moment they finally robbed us of our sense of identity

by Simon Heffer

Published in the *Daily Mail*, 10 February 1996

One of the most agonising moments in childhood is when you realise that, however satisfactory some familiar aspect of your life is, there is always someone out there determined to wreck it for you. As we become older, we come to recognise the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" principle. But, sinisterly, state officials and politicians always think they know better than those they govern and act with complete contempt towards popular feeling.

Those of us who grew up under the Wilson-Heath terror of the late Sixties and early Seventies understand the phenomenon only too well. We saw the crashing down of morals, landmarks and icons of a society that had evolved calmly over the preceding decades. We felt the nature of our country suddenly jolt into an unrecognisable form, as if disfigured by an especially brutal electric shock. And nothing so perfectly epitomises this evil as one particular event, whose 25th anniversary falls this coming week.

The imposition of a decimal currency on Britain in February 1971 was as clear a division between the old and the new as could be imagined. Ties of history and tradition were wrenched apart. A thing of beauty - not just our old coinage, but also the historical reasons behind it - was destroyed. We seemed to have stopped living in a society that had respect for, and derived nourishment from, the past; instead it was replaced by hatred and fear of that heritage.

The Government told the people that, in the modern world, it knew better than they did when it came to what was good for them. And a fundamental truth about modern politics and our so-called democracy was proved irrefutably: that anything on which the two front benches in the House of Commons agree must, almost by definition, be wrong and against the interests of the rest of us.

It was Jim Callaghan who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced in the spring of 1966 that it was the Government's intention for there to be a decimal currency by 1971. We had heard all this before, and were not to know that this time the Government had the ideological determination to do it.

The old florin, or two shilling piece, had been introduced in 1849 as a denomination of a tenth of a pound, as a prelude to a Victorian experiment in a decimal coinage. The whole idea, quite rightly, became something of a national joke. The author Trollope made the devising of a decimal system one of the cranky obsessions of his political creation, Mr Plantagenet Palliser.

Everyone was quite happy with the old system whereby 12 pennies made a shilling and 20 shillings made a pound. It had always been that way; everyone understood it. There was no need to change it. Indeed, for decades governments had more important things to do and had no wish to alienate the people. In time, the florin became an object of affection. It was, in its original design, a pleasing coin, beautifully ornate, with the lettering in the Gothic forms so popular in an early Victorian Britain which was then rediscovering, not merely in architecture and decoration but also in other less tangible forms, the aesthetic and moral values of the past and learning from them.

It is often said, not inaccurately, that most of our supposedly oldest traditions were invented by the Victorians. But what is less readily understood is that the Victorians based these 'new' traditions on a close and sympathetic understanding of the past.

But it was in the Sixties that society developed its gratuitous hatred of the past and all it represented, that its icons and landmarks began to be destroyed. But, in fact, it was not society in its broadest sense which developed that hatred. It was a small, powerful clique at the top determined to 'modernise' Britain, even though an essentially conservative people were quite happy with things the way they were.

The clique was not interested in modernisation in its acceptable sense, such as promoting helpful new technologies: witness the unstinting support they gave over many years to the entrenchment of the Luddite mentality of the trades unions. No, their modernisation entailed a levelling of social distinctions, a breaking of a sense of historic continuity, a rise in the power of the state (especially in the power of unelected officials, like themselves), and the elimination of anything that gave Britain a national identity.

The old coinage was an important symbol of the sense of the past, the link with an old and self-confident Britain that they were determined to end.

By 1966, 117 years after the Gothic florin had 'blazed' a trail for decimalisation, it was impossible to find anyone in the political class of whatever persuasion who was prepared to defend the old coinage. Thanks to the inflation caused by successive governments since World War II, people were having to carry around larger and larger quantities of heavy coins. A new generation of adding machines would find it easier to cope with a decimal system (even though the old ones seemed to have no problem adding six shillings and fourpence three-farthing to nine shillings and elevenpence ha'penny). Above all, it was argued, children and old people would be less confused by a simpler system.

Not long ago, there had been no reason to change; now, it seemed, there was no reason not to. Around the country, odd little anti-decimalisation groups were formed. But one thing government was, and still is, expert at is bulldozing opinion so that anyone who disagrees with the consensus is automatically branded as needing psychiatric help. So when, in early 1967, the Decimal Currency Bill went through the Commons, not a voice was raised against it. The only debate was about whether the new unit of currency should be based on the existing pound sterling, or on a unit equivalent to ten shillings; and one or two crackpot backbenchers got up and proposed their own eccentric variations.

The public were blissfully unaware, for the most part, of what was going on; blissfully unaware of the hidden agenda, seen when guileless backbenchers rose in the Commons to praise the 'modernisation' that this move would achieve. Only once it was safely on the statute book did the Bill's full implications start to come home.

It was nonsense to say that a decimal coinage would be easier for old people. Those who had lived for 70 or 80 years with the old system, and who were familiar with the visually distinct old coins, needed help only if they were blind or senile, in which case things would be no better under decimalisation.

For children, it meant - once followed by the march of the equally repellent metric system of measurements, and of the pocket calculator - that the former disciplines of mental arithmetic, so valuable in later life, were replaced by a single ability to divide or multiply by ten.

But, worst of all, by eliminating the old coinage, the state eliminated a living part of our history. Even in the 1960s, copper coins up to 100 years old regularly appeared in a child's change when he or she bought a packet of sweets. Bun pennies - so called because the highly flattering portrait of Queen Victoria on the front showed her with her hair tied up in that style - brought the Britain of a distant age, before the motorcar and the telephone, directly into one's hands. In the last six years of her reign she appeared on the coins heavily veiled, an old widow; the coins of her son, grandson and great-grandson left other clues to history. Now, the child buying his sweets sees no coin minted before 1968 which is presumably a point when the cleverer among them think life must have begun. We have scythed ourselves off from the past.

There is no affection for our modern coinage: we never look at our coins in the way that, as a child, I remember examining William Wyon's sensitive engravings on the Victorian coinage, or George William de Saulles' magnificently pompous, swaggering, self-confident designs for the coinage of

Edward VII. The new coinage has taken on the almost token, lightweight air of what we used to regard as debased, nearly worthless Continental currencies, many will feel appropriately, in the light of our present economic circumstances. Perhaps the greatest treat our children are denied is the feeling of jangling a couple of big, handsome half-crowns in their pockets and thinking themselves obscenely rich. But the destruction of the coinage was all of a piece with the destruction of so much of our way of life at that time. The period from 1965 to 1975 was the golden age of 'cheap and nasty', when anaemic looking shoddy housing estates were dumped on the edge of almost every attractive town or village, creating a rootless population and breaking up old, happy communities. Harmless market towns had their hearts ripped out to provide shopping centres of the most hideous concrete complexion.

Old certainties were ravaged by inflation, as successive governments bent on crusades of social engineering spent far more money than we earned - something for which, in this case unfairly, decimalisation was partly blamed. The destructiveness of our rulers at that time knew few limits. Our education system was turned upside-down against the wishes of the people in the name of 'progress' and 'modernisation'. Criminals changed places with their victims. An immigration policy was allowed to operate that created ghettos, unrest, poverty, social division, and changed the face of large parts of Britain.

Without it being a manifesto commitment at the 1970 election, Ted Heath took us - by a majority of just eight on the second reading of the Bill in the House of Commons - into a Common Market that few outside the political classes wanted to join. Not only was the electorate not properly asked about any of these earthquakes, nobody was prepared, either, to take responsibility for the consequences of such carelessness, incompetence and downright stupidity.

Looking back, when it comes to deciding who did the most damage, one cannot distinguish between the Tory and Labour governments of the period. Both seem, historically, to have been in competition with each other over whether Ted Heath or Harold Wilson could better take Britain to pieces and rebuild it badly.

The only mistake we make is to think it is all better now. It isn't. Those modernising forces are still there, still off the leash. What public benefit is there in legislation that decrees that one cannot buy a pint of shandy? Who will stop the Government, in three years' time, from making it equally illegal to go into a butcher's shop and buy a pound of loose sausages? Have we really given up so much on our way of life? Or is there someone among our rulers who will have the courage to cry: 'Stop!'

## ***In the Lords: Lord Blencathra on Weights & Measures definition of metre and kilogram, 20 May 2020***

My Lords, I thank my noble friend the Minister for giving us the chance to speak on this important subject. Indeed, we used to speak of nothing else but the Planck and Avogadro constants in the Bishops' Bar, so let me make some mischievous points today. The current definitions have been in effect since 1985, and they have worked perfectly. Since 1889, the IPK (International Prototype of the Kilogram) has been used to define the mass of the kilogram. It is a golf ball-sized object made of 90% platinum and 10% iridium and is regarded as the most perfect object to define its weight because of its stability. There is the original IPK itself, six sister copies and hundreds of national prototypes that are held by world Governments.

The excuse for this change is that the boffins say that the IPKs are unstable because their weight varies over time by up to the weight of 50 specks of dust. Their masses are calibrated as offset values. For instance, K20, the US's primary standard, originally had an official mass of 1 kilogram minus 39 micrograms in 1889. In 1948, it was down 19 micrograms, or 19 specks of dust, but the latest verification shows it to be precisely identical to its original 1889 value. These specks of dust variations are accounted for all the time by using offset values. It is like the North Pole and magnetic variation, which everyone simply recalculates by taking the variation into account. For 130 years, there has never been a problem with any national IPK distorting the weight of a kilogram, so why change it?

The 1985 Act states that a metre is defined as: "the length of the path travelled by light in vacuum during a time interval of  $1/299\,792\,458$  of a second."

Can my noble friend tell the House whether that simple definition has caused any errors over the past 35 years? Have there been critical measurement mistakes because the second has not been defined as: "taking the fixed numerical value of the caesium frequency  $\Delta\nu_{\text{Cs}}$ , the unperturbed ground-state hyperfine transition frequency of the caesium 133 atom."

Will I have to return my tape measure to B&Q since the metre scale no longer corresponds to 1.09361 yards? Will the Minister tell us what practical differences these changes will make?

In conclusion, I would prefer my noble friend to tackle the law-breaking by many councils which are illegally introducing metric measures on road signs. The law is absolutely clear: metric units are not permitted on distance signs, whether by themselves or in conjunction with imperial units. Distances must be in miles and yards only, and that applies to all traffic signs, not just those for motorists. Yet there are countless examples of councils erecting illegal signs in metric units. Will my noble friend therefore take up this matter urgently with the Department for Transport to make sure that all councils obey the law of this country and not what they might wish it to be?

## **Historic Houses – "today's system"**

*Mark Tinsley wrote to the Historic House Magazine on 8 October 2020:* Sir, it is disappointing to see that in Historic House Magazine you use unhistoric weights and measures. In the Autumn 2020 issue, for example, the recipe for Confit of Mulberries and Pears ought surely to read: 1lb pears, ½ mulberries, 1 glass red wine, ½ sugar.

*Reply from James Probert, Editor, Historic House Magazine, 14 October 2020:* Thank you for taking the trouble to write ... Historic House magazine takes a consistent approach to recipes. Where, in historic recipes, quantities are given in Imperial or other historic terms, those measures are left unchanged. Modern recipes, or modern rewordings of historic recipes intended for practical use, are quantified in metric, today's official system of weights and measures and that in which ingredients bought from shops are packaged.

The recipe you refer to was reproduced verbatim in the left-hand column in its historic form. You will note that the author did not include any measures - common in recipes before the late eighteenth century. The same recipe was rewritten in modern English, for use by modern cooks, in the right-hand column. In doing so we introduced measures for the first time; it is only right and proper that quantities created today are denominated in today's system.

I hope this puts your mind at rest. I am so glad that you read *Historic House* so assiduously. We are so grateful to you for your support for our vital work. This year more than ever it will have made a real difference to the chances of survival for some of Britain's most fragile historic places.

*BWMA note:* Mr Probert fails to see that the "chances of survival for some of Britain's most fragile historic places" are mirrored in the survival of British weights and measures; for the political and financial forces that seek to eliminate imperial measures - and tear down statues - are the very same that would demolish historic houses, build tunnels under Stonehenge, and concrete over the green belt with "luxury flats". By abandoning British weights and measures, *Historic Houses* is abandoning its own front line.

### ***In the Commons, 11 June 2020***

*Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):* What steps he is taking across Government to increase public confidence in the policy of easing the covid-19lockdown.

*Pavmaster General (Penny Mordaunt):* We recognise the range of emotions that people are feeling about the lifting of restrictions. Tremendous sacrifices have been made to get the virus under control, and incredible patience shown. We published our recovery strategy on 11 May and each day our measures follow the approach it sets out. Protecting public health is and must always be, our No. 1 priority.

*Sir Desmond Swayne:* To avoid a damaging second spike to our economy, is not a yard more than sufficient?

*Penny Mordaunt:* We are determined to get the UK economy, including the hospitality sector up and running again and our schools reopened. Research published in *The Lancet* last week showed that a physical distance of at least 1 metre or, if my right hon. Friend insist, 1.09 yards.

*Sir Desmond Swayne:* I do!

*Penny Mordaunt:* I thought he might. That was strongly associated with a lowered risk of transmission but a distance of 2 metres was likely to be more effective. The advice therefore remains that wherever possible the public should keep two metres from one another, but the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies keeps that under review.

## Convert your thinking on property measurements, Bob Aaron, *Toronto Star*, 21 December 2018

It never fails to amaze me how the real estate community stubbornly sticks to the old imperial measurements in a country which supposedly converted to the metric system back in the 1970s. Let's take the marketing of real estate. The generally accepted practice in the real estate community is for condominiums, homes and lot sizes to be priced in dollars per square foot. I doubt that the average Toronto purchaser would know if a condominium being offered for sale at \$73.32 per square metre is equivalent to \$800 per square foot, or if a 1,000-square-foot unit is 92.903 square metres. In my experience, virtually all real estate here is sized and priced in the imperial system.

When I first starting searching titles years ago, we had to search back a minimum of 40 years or more to find a solid starting point, or root of title. Sometimes, that meant going back to some point in the 19th century. I recall searching titles to rural properties where the original deed from the Crown, and many subsequent deeds, were expressed in the pre-imperial system — when lengths were set out in chains and links. I had to convert the numbers using the formula that one chain was 66 feet, divided into 100 links. Most of our city streets today are officially based on the old surveyor's chain of 66 feet, even though the pavement may be much narrower.

Today, when I review property measurements with clients, using either a land survey or a subdivision plan, most of them still think in feet, although younger buyers are generally more comfortable with metres. Registered plans for new homes and condominiums are invariably shown in metres, but buyers still think of area in terms of square feet. Real estate listings for houses and condominiums are usually published using imperial measurements for dimensions and area as the default, although a button on the online listings may allow conversion to metric measurements.

Most of my clients who have come to Canada from metric countries are comfortable with both systems. Others who were educated in Canada during and after the time of Pierre Trudeau are familiar with both systems, but typically prefer imperial when it comes to real estate. But those who, like me, were raised on feet and inches, are still challenged in understanding metric land measurements.

When I was shopping recently for tiles for a bathroom renovation, I was surprised to find that almost all products available in our supposedly metric country were sized and priced in square feet — mainly due to the fact that they are either made in the U.S. or manufactured for the U.S. market. Imagine walking into a lumber store and asking for a length of “50-by-100” instead of the common “two-by-four.” I find it annoying that we still have a dual system of measurements. I wish we could return to the imperial system of measurements. Call me old-fashioned, but I'd like to have just one system that everyone feels comfortable with.

*Bob Aaron is a Toronto real estate lawyer.*

**Letter from Michael Plumbe to *The Times*, 24 May 2020:** Sir, I saw a sign: ‘KEEP TWO METERS APART’. If those two meters met, they would be ‘meeters’. To avoid confusion, and in the spirit of Brexit, we should keep 6 feet apart. We all recognise this as the height of a tallish man - or woman. Or write ‘2 yards’. Yards are after all supposed to be used on traffic and pedestrian signs so we should know about them.

## Peter Hitchens, *Mail on Sunday*, 15 March 2020

... I have at my elbow twin Penguin paperbacks of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, both bought and first read by me in 1967 when I was 15 or 16. They are cracked and frayed from much re-reading. Both, enjoyably, are priced at three shillings and sixpence, in the old unmodernised, monarchist currency which those of us who once used it all miss, as a symbol of a lost way of life.

Heavens – how free, and how carefree we were then. I won't even try to translate this price into today's tin coinage. It would be like trying to render Shakespeare into the babble of a Radio 1 DJ. It was a completely different thing from what we have now, like so much else from that time. In the messy, unmodernised world of shillings and pence, you see, we felt quite safe from the horrors which Huxley and Orwell predicted. We had no idea what was coming.

Interestingly, both these horrible utopias – one a Communist police state, the other a drugged, family-free, religion-free pleasure dome – use the metric and decimal systems. The vast laboratories in which Huxley's mass-produced babies are brought to life are measured in metres. Beer, in Orwell's dismal totalitarian London, is sold only in litres, and paid for in dollars and cents. I am sure both men did this quite deliberately. They knew that world-reformers have a passion for chilly neatness, and hate the irregular and the old. And there is the great question of which of these prophecies has come true, and which is the more frightening. The unwelcome answer is that both are coming true together, and that they are equally frightening.

*BWMA note:* two other examples of decimal-metric units representing a dystopian future are the ten-hour clock in *Metropolis* (1927) and the kilo in *Soylent Green* (1973). Peter Hitchens' full article is available to read online, search for: Hitchens Mail On Sunday Thought Police 15 March

**Mr S Sinclair writes:** Mr Cooke (*Yardstick 74*) advocates counting up to thirty-five on one's hands. An older method enables us to count up to sixty. With one hand open and palm upwards, you will see that each of the four fingers has three divisions. Reach across with the thumb and touch each division in turn beginning with the little finger and moving along to the index finger. Hold down the thumb of the other hand to account for the first dozen and continue until all five digits of the other hand have been used and you will have reached not just ten, not just thirty-five, but sixty.

*Answers to last Yardstick's crossword:*



## Revolt against the Metric World

*The following article by John Michell was first published in the Summer 1980 issue of "Foot-print", the newsletter of Americans for Customary Weight and Measure.*

Of course, no one wants metrication because, apart from its other disadvantages, the antiquated metric system is far less convenient in actual use than is our own customary system of measures. In no country, not even France, has metrication ever been accepted voluntarily. It has always been imposed by a tyrannical or alien government (e.g. in Russia and China).

Wherever people have had a free choice, they have invariably opted for customary measures. Earlier this year, faced with a popular revolt against mandatory metrication, the British Government disbanded the Metrication Board and announced that any further metrication would be voluntary. Many of the businesses which had experimented with metrics immediately abandoned metrication and reverted to customary measures. There is no prospect of a metric Britain.

Yet the pressure from metrication continues on a world-wide scale. Who is behind it? What are the forces promoting it? Why do they not identify themselves? If we knew the answers to these questions, we should be better informed about those "behind the scenes" manipulation and power groups whose operations on a global scale include the spreading of nuclear technology and other manifestations of centralized control - as well as the metric system.

The fundamental purpose behind the pressure from unidentified interests for universal metrication - according to the conclusion reached after years of studying the subject - is to serve the needs of the international business corporations for one world standard of measures. This would facilitate a process, already under way, in which components of, for example, American or British automobiles are manufactured in countries offering cheap, "strike-proof" labor (e.g., Poland, Bulgaria, even Russia) and merely assembled in their nominal country of origin.

The effect - and indeed the intention of this - is plain. It is to promote recession in the United States and the West, to drive wages down to the levels obtained in countries where cheap or captive labor is available, and to bring about a system of universal domination by certain financial powers which are outside any democratic or national state control and are not even openly identified.

Of all the current menaces to the freedom and recognizable existence of our society, the erosion of democracy by unnamed global oligarchies is the most dangerous - as well as being the source of other immediate threats to human survival. It is important that those few who will read this should be aware that the case for resisting metrication goes far deeper than can be expressed in populist slogans. The threat to customary measures is a threat to human culture itself, and to those traditions of individual liberty which our present society, for all its imperfections, continues to represent.

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