

The Yardstick

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Still, we wait

It has become a cliché to say that the Conservatives are not conservative, and Labour does not represent labour, yet here we are. Restoring the lawful use of imperial measures has to be the lowest-stake act of patriotism *ever*, but the Conservatives have thus far been unable to muster the courage to do it. Perhaps they been captured by the national supermarket chains, or cornered by woke bureaucrats. Probably both; it's as though the Conservatives do not realise they are the Government.

“Politics, Poverty and Belief: A Political Memoir”

Honorary Member Frank Field has published his memoir. Frank was MP for Birkenhead from 1979 to 2019, before being awarded a life peerage in 2020. *A Political Memoir* shares Lord Field's thoughts about his work with the Child Poverty Action Group, his passing legislation for the Minimum Living Wage, and his Christian beliefs. Frank Field maintains his reputation for “thinking the unthinkable”. Available online and from bookshops.

George Logan - Dr Evadne Hinge

The creator of Dr Evadne Hinge, George Logan, died in May, aged 78. As Christopher Hope related in the *Telegraph* on 27 May, Dr Evadne Hinge was offered BWMA honorary membership after a TV scene came to light of her protesting to Dame Hilda Bracket about a garage selling petrol in litres. To sustain the illusion of Hinge and Bracket, George Logan and Patrick Fyffe only did interviews in character, never as themselves. In keeping with this rule, only this issue of *The Yardstick* records the Hon Membership of George Logan; from next issue, we record that of Dr Evadne Hinge.

Glimi Glider

It's 40 years since an Air Canada Boeing 767 ran out of fuel in mid-flight, due to errors caused by the switch to metric measurements. The pilots successfully glided to earth with no serious casualties. To mark the anniversary, we reproduce a piece reporting the event.

Dairy Box

Yardstick 81 featured a till receipt from 1998, showing that Dairy Box weighed 454g (1lb), subsequently reduced to 400g (14.1oz) and then 360g (12.7oz). No sooner had that piece been written than Dairy Box was reduced again, to 326g (11.5oz).

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

BWMA Director's letter to Michael Gove MP, 5 April 2023

I am a constituent of yours, and also Director of the British Weights and Measures Association, which campaigns for the decriminalisation of imperial weights and measures, and against the compulsory use of metric units.

Last summer, the government (BEIS) held a public consultation on "Choice on Units of Measurement: Markings and Sales". The department dealing with it was the Office for Product Safety and Standards, Birmingham.

It has been seven months since the consultation closed, but we've heard nothing more. I wrote to the OPSS in January for an update, but had no reply. Please can you raise an enquiry on my behalf to find out the consultation's present status; and does the government still intend to amend the law to permit the use of imperial units in trade?

Reply from Toby Bell, Parliamentary Assistant, 16 May 2023

As you know the Government is reviewing the use of imperial units for markings to ensure that businesses and consumers have more choice over the measures they use for trade, while ensuring that measurement information remains accurate. This exhibits the sovereignty that we have regained now that the UK has left the EU and it is an important step in taking back control of our national rules.

As you mention, a consultation was launched to hear the views of businesses, trade associations, enforcement authorities, consumers, and consumer organisations, which has now ended. I understand that the Government is analysing the feedback and will share an update once their analysis has concluded.

"Brexit pledge to bring back pounds and ounces stalls", *Sunday Telegraph*, Tony Diver, Whitehall Correspondent, and Will Hazell, 14 May 2023

The return of imperial measurements to Britain is under threat after ministers scaled back plans to abolish European Union rules by the end of the year. Despite a pledge from Boris Johnson at the last election to restore the "ancient liberty" of using pounds and ounces, an official consultation has found that businesses and voters largely prefer the metric system.

Kemi Badenoch, the Business Secretary, this week announced that she would no longer be completing the "Brexit freedoms" process by the year-end. Under a system designed by her predecessor, Jacob Rees-Mogg, civil servants were required to find all EU rules on the UK statute books by the end of 2023 and select which ones to retain. All other measures would be automatically scrapped, according to the

Retained EU Law Bill currently under scrutiny in the House of Lords.

But Ms Badenoch said "a new approach was needed" and she decided to cherry-pick the most "meaningful" laws to be revoked. Her department has published a list of 600 Brussels regulations that will be cancelled at the end of this year. Not included is the EU rule, passed in 2000, that says the metric system must take precedence in the UK when referring to the weight of products. It states that while the use of imperial measures as a "supplementary indicator" is permitted, metric units "shall predominate" and must be given in the same or a larger font than imperial measurements.

Plans to reintroduce pounds and ounces have become a totemic issue for Brexiteers since European regulations forced the retirement of pound-bags of sugar and six-ounce jars of jam. During the 2019 election campaign, Mr Johnson heralded "an era of generosity and tolerance towards traditional measurements" and described the right to use the imperial system as an "ancient liberty"...

Despite support for imperial measurements among Brexiteers, the consultation into the issue announced by Mr Johnson last June - to coincide with Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee - has thrown up negative responses from business leaders and voters. Ms Badenoch is understood to be open to exploring the idea of a return of imperial measurements, but is considering how to respond to the consultation.

BWMA comment: the reply from Mr Gove's office came just after the announcement on which 587 regulations would be revoked by the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill at the end of 2023. The return of imperial units not only failed to reach this list, but never made the original list of 2,400 regulations. Our letter to the Cabinet Office of 31 October 2022, re-sent 3 January 2023 (see Yardstick 81) was never responded to.

In the Commons: Jacob Rees-Mogg, Conservative, North East Somerset, 24 May 2023

The fundamental problem - the suspicion that we can see people beginning to think about - is that of the 587 rules that are being repealed, hardly a single one changes alignment with the European Union. Is there, hidden away in the bowels of Government, some decision that we will in fact remain aligned with the European Union, possibly because of the Windsor protocol? Otherwise, why are we not repealing all those strange and unimportant things? Apparently we cannot get a dog bone from a butcher because of EU rules. Why has that not gone? Why have we not been allowed to bring back imperial measures, which have been promised for years? They are not the biggest reward of Brexit, but why are we doing these little bits and pieces in the 587 that are there?

JET'S FUEL RAN OUT AFTER METRIC CONVERSION ERRORS

New York Times, 30 July 1983

Air Canada said yesterday that its Boeing 767 jet ran out of fuel in midflight last week because of two mistakes in figuring the fuel supply of the airline's first aircraft to use metric measurements. After both engines lost their power, the pilots made what is now thought to be the first successful emergency "dead stick" landing of a commercial jetliner.

The pilots of the Ottawa-to-Edmonton flight came in over the end of the runway at Gimli, Manitoba, at an abnormally high speed of about 180 knots because the engine failure made it impossible to use the flaps to make a slower approach. But the only serious damage was a collapsed nose gear, and the only casualties among the 69 people on board were two passengers who suffered minor injuries.

The captain, Robert Pearson, was helped in gauging his approach to the 6,800-foot-long strip by the fact that he has had a glider-pilot license for 10 years. Another fortunate circumstance was that the co-pilot, Maurice Quintal, had taken training in the Canadian Air Force at the Gimli field, which is no longer in active use except as a drag strip for automobile races.

The entire episode produced two contradictory emotions in the aviation world. One was deep concern over how simple errors, this time in a switch to the metric system with the introduction of the Boeing 767, could come so close to producing a major disaster. The other was admiration at the skill of the pilots, whatever their role in the original errors, in putting the huge wide-body craft down safely when, without power, they would have no chance to make second landing approach.

One highly respected industry pilot in this country who asked not to be identified said: "The captain may get the book thrown at him for taking off with too little fuel. But when the time came, he was there."

The carrier said that fuel had been measured manually with special "drip sticks" because the electronic gauging system aboard the plane, Air Canada's first metric aircraft, was not working properly. But in converting the fuel volume determined from the stick readings into total fuel weight, the wrong conversion factors were used. The net result was that the pilots apparently thought the figure for fuel weight on board was in kilograms when it was really pounds. Since one kilogram equals 2.2 pounds, the plane took off with about half the fuel that it should have had.

Normally, airplanes do not take any more fuel than is needed to complete a flight and still have a safety margin. To carry more fuel involves unnecessary weight and hence raises consumption of costly fuel.

Errors were made not only before the day's initial takeoff from Montreal but also before the takeoff from Ottawa, an interim stop. The problems with the on-board fuel-gauge system not only denied the pilots an automatic check on the fuel load but also meant that the crew did not receive the warning normally given by amber lights half an hour before fuel will run out. The plane was cruising at an altitude of 41,000 feet when the engines abruptly started losing power.

When the plane began gliding toward the ground, the co-pilot promptly recalled his training days at Gimli and gave the captain a heading. The 767 glided about 60 miles to reach the field. The final touchdown was made just over an hour before the strip would have disappeared in darkness.

A further significance of the incident was that it underscored concerns among pilots about operation of the newest jet airliners. Safety specialists of the main pilots' union in the United States had recently approved a statement on the subject of training. They expressed the view that crews were not receiving adequate education in the functioning of the many automated systems used on the new Boeing aircraft.

Furthermore, a union committee has been working for a year or more studying how to minimize confusion generated when switches are made to the metric system. New airliners in the United States still measure fuel in pounds but most new foreign planes have switched to the metric system.

The problems of Air Canada flight 143 began on Friday, July 22, on the trip from Edmonton to Montreal. Aberrations, still not pinned down, began to show up in the on-board system for displaying fuel quantity. The focus of this system is an overhead cockpit panel with three main gauges. Two show the amount of fuel in the left and right main tanks. The third shows the total. The gauges are calibrated in kilograms. This was a departure from custom on Air Canada, whose other planes for years have measured fuel weight in pounds.

BWMA note: following the incident, Captain Pearson was demoted for six months, and First Officer Quintal suspended for two weeks, along with three maintenance workers. However, two years later, the pilots were awarded the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale Diploma for Outstanding Airmanship. The plane was repaired and returned to service until 2008 when it was retired to Mojave Spaceport. A film was made in 1995, *Freefall: Flight 174*, in which Capt. Pearson made a cameo appearance. Both this film and a 19-minute CBC documentary, *The Gimli Glider: 30 Years Later*, are available on Youtube.

Metric downsizing: Bisto gravy powder



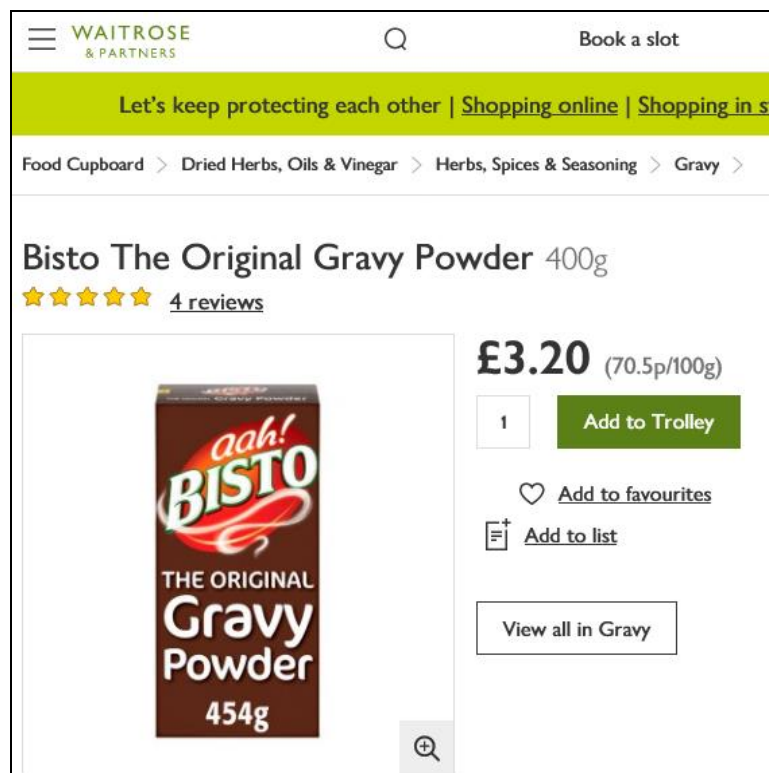
Premier Foods is introducing 400g metric packs of Bisto gravy powder alongside the traditional 454g packs, the metric equivalent of 16oz.

These packs are the same height and design as the former packs, and so virtually indistinguishable.



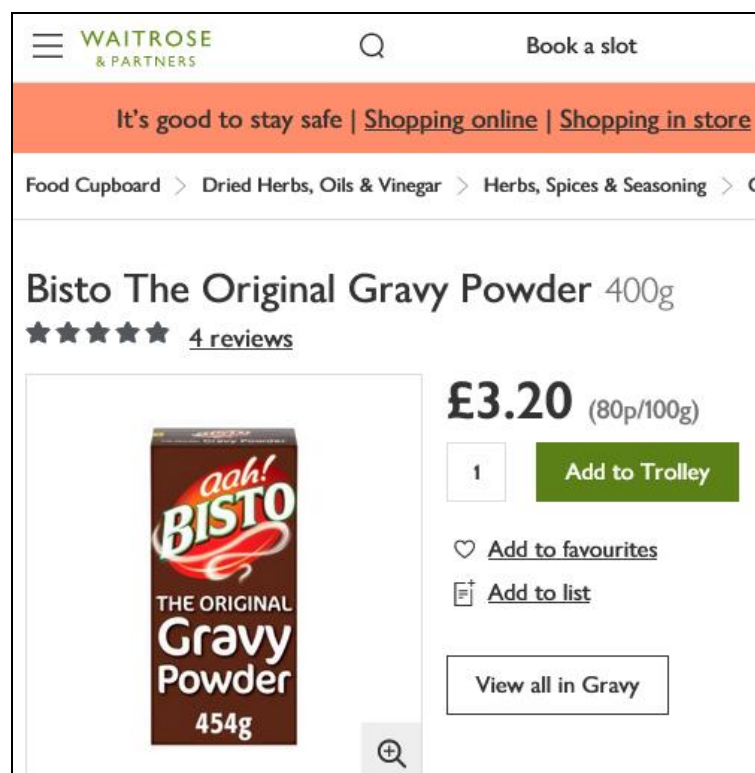
Bisto, as it used to be:





The above is a screenshot from the Waitrose website, dated 16 January 2022, showing Bisto gravy power after its downsizing to 400g. Waitrose did not change the 454g image, but the new 400g weight is indicated in grey. How do we know whether the £3.20 price reflected the weight reduction? The answer lies in the unit price of 70.5p/100g, which works out at £3.20 per 454g, not £3.20 per 400g. As with the image, Waitrose forgot to update the unit price.

The below screenshot is dated 11 March 2022. Waitrose had still not changed the image, but did correct the unit price to 80p/100g. Bisto and Waitrose can therefore be shown to have kept the £3.20 price constant when switching from the 454g size to the 400g metric pack. Readers may wish to keep this in mind when reading the letter on the back page, particularly the last line of the sixth paragraph.



“21 Minutes”

First Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Tuesday 1 November 1994

[Mr Edward O'Hara in the Chair]

Draft Weights and Measures Act 1985 (Metrication) (Amendment) Order 1994

The compulsory metrication regulations were implemented via statutory instrument, nodded through by a committee of 14 MPs in 21 minutes. Aside from the minister, Ian Taylor, only three MPs spoke, and no vote was taken. Here are the minutes of that meeting.

10.30 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr Ian Taylor): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Weights and Measures Act 1985 (Metrication) (Amendment) Order 1994.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to consider the draft Weights and Measures (Metrication) (Miscellaneous Goods) (Amendment) Order 1994 and the draft Weights and Measures Units of Measurement Regulations 1994.

Mr Taylor: I am pleased to be here under your chairmanship, Mr O'Hara, in this baptismal statutory instruments standing Committee. I am also delighted to have the voluntary support of senior colleagues who have decided that the Committee merits their attendance, and I am grateful to them. I am also pleased to be seated opposite the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr Griffiths), with whom I have sparred on many enjoyable occasions. I am sure that this morning will be equally enjoyable - at least I hope so. I await his contribution in due course.

The three statutory instruments will implement the 1989 European Community units of measurement directive in respect of authorising metric units of measurement and their use for weights and measures and price marking. Members of the Committee will be aware that the United Kingdom already uses the metric system for many purposes. It has been taught in schools in the United Kingdom since 1974, and many everyday products are now sold in metric units - as anyone who visits a supermarket or do-it-yourself store will be aware.

The provisions before the Committee will continue the metrication process. They will require the use of metric units from 1 October 1995 for sales of food that is prepacked in variable weights, such as cheese or meat; of goods by length, such as fabric, or by area, such as carpet; and of petrol, diesel and other liquid fuels. The legislation will also require the use

of metric units from 1 January 2000 for food sold loose from bulk such as meat, poultry, cheese, fish, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

The legislation will, however, allow the continued use of the mile for road traffic signs, speedometers and odometers, and of the pint for sales of draught beer and cider, and for milk in returnable containers. I am sure that colleagues will welcome the continuation of those very British traditions.

In preparing the legislation, my Department undertook extensive consultations with industry, retailers, enforcement groups and consumer bodies. More than 700 organisations were consulted and, in general, responses were low key and supportive of the Department's proposals, although some consumer organisations expressed a desire for full metrication with no exceptions.

To assist consumers to adapt to the changes, food retailers will be required to dual-price items or to display a price conversion chart, showing metric unit prices and their imperial equivalents. The principal metrication changeover date in the legislation - 1 October 1995 - is nine months later than the date of 1 January 1995 required by the directive.

There are several reasons for that, including the need to consult interested parties about the conversion chart and the fact that the drafting of the provisions proved to be more complicated than was first envisaged. A conversion date of 1 January 1995 would not give industry sufficient time to make the necessary changes. I hope that the delay decided upon is understood and accepted by the Committee.

Finally, I stress that the legislation goes no further than the requirements of the directive, and that imperial units will not disappear. There will only be a change to metric measures when the law presently provides for the use of imperial units of measurement in a manner contrary to the 1989 directive. In many cases, units of measurement are used through custom and practice, not because they are required by law. For example, the measurement of a cricket pitch - I note the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr Cash) in this context - or of a race course is not laid down by law. I assure the Committee that those and similar examples will not be affected by the legislation. I commend the draft regulations and the orders to the Committee.

Mr Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I will add my and my colleagues' words of welcome to you, Mr O'Hara, and thank the Minister for his kind words.

We all have experience of metrication, especially those of us who lived through the decimalisation of the coinage. The dire fears that none of us would get to grips with that have proved false. We all remember that seven shillings and sixpence now equals 35p.

Hon. Members: No, 37 and a half pence.

Mr Griffiths: It is plain that my memory is going, just as it is clear that more than a generation of children have never been aware of pounds, shillings and pence.

I wish to raise one or two issues for clarification by the Minister. What protection will be available to the public when metrication is introduced? The issue is not whether we cling to old weights and measures but whether whatever weights and measures we adopt are understood by the public, so that they know what they are being sold in terms of weight or volume. In saying that he would allow for dual weights and dual measures for some time, the Minister touched upon the important problem of how clearly measures will be marked on the products and whether the consumer might be deceived when they buy goods from the shelves,

I am also concerned about a more serious matter - that some unscrupulous trades people will use the excuse of metrication to short-change the public. I am grateful to Mr Hugh McLaughlin of Kilmarnock for providing me with an example of that practice in Scotland. The Tennants-owned pub, The Charleston, in Kilmarnock has moved towards metric measures, and the effects of that are interesting. What was previously a measure of one fifth of a gill for whisky costing £1.1p* is now on sale as a 25ml measure costing 99p - a price reduction, one would have thought. The only problem is that one fifth of a gill equals 28.39ml and the new measure on sale is 25ml which is 3.9ml less than the old measure. Therefore, the new measure is more than 13 per cent smaller than the old measure, but the price has been cut by only 4 per cent. The public will be very wary of that type of cheating.

I regret that the legislation does not include more provisions to ensure that the public is protected from the type of short-changing that Tennants perform in The Charleston. I know that breweries have to recover the investment price of optics when they change the measures that they serve. However, it strikes me that if they cut the measure by more than 13 per cent., the optics will pay for themselves in a week or a fortnight, even though the prices charged will remain a year or more. That is the sort of case - and there are others - on which we will be focusing our attention.

My office in the House will run a consumer monitoring unit on the short-changing of the public as we go metric. We will not allow anyone to pinch pennies out of customers' pockets. The same applies to larger

supermarkets and other retailers who may seek to round up their prices rather than charge the exact equivalent or a lesser price. The public will look to many supermarkets to ensure that they will get a fairer deal than at present. We have no wish to block this measure but I look forward to receiving assurances from the Minister that, first and foremost, the public will be protected, rather than simply the interests of the trader - which, sadly, are stressed too frequently in these measures.

10.41 am

Mr William Cash (Stafford): I thought that the spokesman for the Opposition made an important point, and I trust that the Minister will reply. We do not want short-changing or cheating under the arrangements. It is regrettable that, as has already happened because of directives, we shall lose many traditional names. Life moves on and we must accept the fact that those decisions have been taken, although I say that with great reluctance.

10.42 am

Mr Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West & Penistone): I shall follow up the references to short-changing made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South and refer the Minister to schedule 5 of the regulations, particularly in relation to British Coal. He will be aware that, at present, there is a national concessionary fuel agreement that covers 250,000 people. Of that number, 60,000 receive smokeless fuel and 70,000 receive bituminous coal. That coal is generally distributed through the national fuel distributors, who contract out. I want the Minister to give an assurance that consultations have taken place with British Coal and national fuel distributors.

Perhaps he could also consult with the Minister for Energy and Industry, to ensure that there will be an educative process in which recipients under the agreement - who are generally former mineworkers or their widows, many of whom are 70 years of age or older will be clearly told their allocation, so that they can keep a check on it, and that British Coal or the Coal Authority will be thoroughly involved in the process.

10.43 am

Mr Ian Taylor: I am grateful to hon. Members for putting their points clearly and succinctly. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South made an important point with which I completely agree. The Government have no desire to enable measures taken under this directive to do anything other than ensure that the public are properly protected. The whole principle of dual pricing has been particularly arranged to be clear and precise, and discussions have taken place with the British Retail Consortium to ensure

* BWMA note: This is as minuted; we assume it was meant to say £1.03

that the way in which conversion charts or dual pricings are displayed leaves no room for doubt.

It will always be possible for someone to ask for a pound of vegetables even after metrication, although the unit to be sold would be expressed in the contract in metric terms. There will be a whole process of education, and we are doing our best to make matters simple for members of the public.

As to the specific point made by the hon. Member about slick pricing, I share his concern, and I am glad that he has drawn it to the Committee's attention. The public could write to their Member of Parliament, which would enable any difficulty to be much more publicly aired. The case of the gill is not part of the documents before us today. That has already been laid before Parliament and the changeover takes place on 1 January 1995.

Mr Nigel Griffiths: Although I used a Scottish example, in England one sixth of the gill, which is 23.67ml, is going up to 25ml. We will watch carefully to see whether the price increase to take it up to 25ml is the same percentage increase as the amount of liquid - or whether it will be used to inflate prices over and above the measure of the increased measure that people will receive.

Mr Taylor: My answer is partly that competitive pressures should expose any sharp practice. Obviously there is an element of commercial decision. If Tennants or any other brewery decided as a matter of policy to hide a price increase, that should be exposed. The cross reference is that one quarter of a gill translates into 35ml in commercial terms, although the accurate description is 35.5ml. One sixth of a gill translates to 25ml, although the commercial measurement is 23.7ml. I shall look into the particular details that the hon. Gentleman raised. If I decide that further clarification is necessary, I will write to him.

Trading standards officers will remain responsible for looking out for any sharp practice where the public may be misled. The Government are continuing to keep a close watch to ensure that this change, which is widely welcomed by the retail industry, does not lead to any sharp practice. Already in most supermarkets 90 per cent of the goods sold are sold in metric units, although the imperial equivalent is usually expressed next to it. The majority of groceries have been sold in metric units since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Competitive pressures make it less likely that there will be hidden slick pricing or price rises. Shoppers are sophisticated, and they shop around to make sure that they get the best value for money.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said that it was sad that we were making these changes. When he supported the Single European Act and the single

European market he knew, as I did - although I was not a Member of House at the time - that certain measures would have to be harmonised throughout the European Community. As a Government we have done our best to ensure that in matters that do not affect trade, such as the use of the pint in the pub, or which are not classified as use for trade, such as the size of a cricket pitch, the old measurements can prevail. We are not attempting to delve deeply into traditional British habits.

Where there is a trade use and it is part of trading either by individuals in shops or in commercial contracts, it is right not only for customers to be aware of single pricing throughout the single market but for businesses to be able to use one measurement term throughout the single market, and that is the metric basis. We have done our best to ensure that those corners of British life that we value so much are protected, yet at the same time that the single market is dealt with fairly throughout. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that and feels that we have done our best on his prompting.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone made an important point about coal. I will ask officials about it, to make sure that it is properly safeguarded. However, I am informed that the concessionary arrangements in the legislation express the allowances in imperial and metric units and, from 1 October 1995, they will refer to metric units in a rounded-up figure, which will make it easy to understand. But as I am not familiar with the issue, I will write to the hon. Gentleman if I feel that it needs further clarification. I hope that he accepts that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Committee has considered the draft Weights and Measures Act 1985 (Metrication) (Amendment) Order 1994.

Draft Weights and Measures (Metrication) (Miscellaneous Goods) (Amendment) Order 1994

Resolved,

That the Committee has considered the draft Weights and Measures (Metrication) (Miscellaneous Goods) (Amendment) Order 1994. [Mr Ian Taylor]

Draft Weights and Measures Units of Measurement Regulations 1994

Resolved,

That the Committee has considered the draft Weights and Measures Units of Measurement Regulations 1994. [Mr Ian Taylor]

Committee rose at nine minutes to Eleven O'clock.

The following Members attended the Committee: Mr Edward O'Hara (Chairman), Mr Kenneth Baker, Mr Bendall, Mr Ian Bruce, Mr Burns, Mr Cash, Mr Clapham, Mr Jim Cunningham, Mr Nigel Griffiths, Mr Harvey, Mr McAvoy, Sir Fergus Montgomery, Mr Streeter, Mr Ian Taylor.

A pence for your thoughts

Peter Hitchens

Mail On Sunday, 21 April 2016

At 8.24 this morning on the Today programme on BBC Radio 4, the presenter, John Humphrys, did a very rare thing. He made an on-air correction. I assume this followed a stream of stinging complaints from listeners of a certain age. Why? One of the Corporation's Royal correspondents, Peter Hunt, had reminisced on air that the Queen had been born in far-off days when 'a pint of milk cost one pence'.

Now, either this will pass you by or it will infuriate you. To anyone of my generation, it is like hearing someone say. "There was only one geese on the pond" or "My mum gave me a sugar mice". That is to say, it might be pardonable in a three-year-old, but in an educated adult it is an astonishing failure to grasp the rules of the English language. The words 'one' and 'pence' cannot be put in the same phrase without short-circuiting the language, causing a loud bang, a bright flash and clouds of smoke in any sentences nearby. Stretcher-bearers would normally need to be called. But in this case it is worse because it is hopelessly entangled with the rusty barbed wire of national culture.

Proper British people used to use something called money, quite different from the magnetic tokens and unconvincing scraps of paper which now pass for this thing. The coins that clanked in our pockets were mainly things called pennies, large bronze discs a bit more than an inch across, which banks weighed rather than counted (because there was an exact relation between weight and value, three pennies to an ounce, I think) which their scales were calibrated to note. They're still used to weight the mechanism in the great clock of Big Ben. They had Britannia staring out to sea on one side, one hand resting on a shield bearing the Union Jack, the other holding a trident (the three-pronged fish spear, not the nuclear missile). On the other side the monarch's head, or rather a monarch's head. The oldest I ever received in change was dated 1868, polished almost smooth, though many ('Bun Pennies') still had the beautiful portrait of the young Queen Victoria with her hair in a bun, later replaced by the gloomy old veiled widow. Every handful of change was a history lesson, and a bit of a Latin lesson too, because the penny featured so much more of the royal title (in that language, but abbreviated) than modern coins do. Edward VII was common, George V even more so, George VI and the young Elizabeth not even worth a glance. Farthings had just been abolished when I began to get weekly pocket money, as had the silver threepence, but the half-penny, universally

known as a 'ha'penny (pronounced 'haypenny') was still very much in use

The unBritish-looking decimal 'pennies' and half-pennies which were introduced in 1971 never achieved familiarity or popularity. The half pennies stuck to your fingertip, slipped into cracks and were more or less useless for anything except as emergency screwdrivers. And people couldn't bring themselves to call them pennies or ha'pennies. The transition from one system of money, the old, intelligent, handsome British one to the new dimwit, ugly, global one immediately obliterated the penny, ha'penny, threepenny bit and half-crown. But some of our old friends survived – the sixpence, the shilling and the florin, re-designated as two and half pence, five pence and ten pence. All these have now been withdrawn and no trace remains of the coinage we once had as a free and independent nation.

But the new penny was an anomalous interloper. I think the problem lay in the fact that the new penny's value bore no relation to that of the old penny – it was supposedly worth more but was smaller and seemed to buy less. And what was actually a cent was called a 'penny' because the government knew that calling it a 'cent' would make people feel (as well they might have done) that they had quietly been occupied by some foreign power and had lost their country. It's an amusing paradox that Americans call their cents 'pennies' out of ancient habit. But we couldn't bring ourselves to call these trivial, unlovely things 'pennies'.

So they were either referred to rather scornfully as 'pee', 'new pee' or, strangely as 'pence' in the singular. I first came across this on Clydeside in the summer of 1971 where I was working as a Trotskyist agitator on the fringes of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders 'work-in' protest against the yard closures there. I and others were trying to sell great reams of special issues of the 'Socialist Worker' to the workers, priced at one new penny. An enterprising urchin offered to take a bundle of them and sell them for us, and I was astonished to hear him brightly calling out to the passing proletarians 'One pence for a paper!' He did better than we did.

It was the first time I'd heard this odd formula, and it puzzled me then and for some time afterwards. Now I think I understand it. But in fact Mr Hunt had it wrong. A pint of milk in 1926 cost a penny a pint, not 2.4 pennies or one new pee. Now it costs more than seven shillings and ought to cost a good deal more if the supermarkets weren't squeezing the dairy farmers so hard. And if you know that fact and remember what a shilling once was, you understand what has happened to our national wealth and to our society.

How the Mile was Saved

Derek Norman

The Euro Realist, May 2012

I was inspired to write this article in response to Michael Waugh's letter in the April edition of the *Euro Realist* in which he said he enjoyed my article headed "Erasing Imperial" in the March issue. Thanks for that, Michael. However, a section of Michael's letter goes on to say that "Sign posts are all in miles and speed limits are in miles per hour". I thought this might be the appropriate time to explain the work of Active Resistance to Metrication (ARM) in ensuring that road signs continue to display distances in traditional British units of measurement. The British Weights and Measures Association, supports the work of ARM, but is not involved in the physical activities of ARM.

The 12th July, this year, is the 10th anniversary of a letter sent by a middle-ranking official to all local authorities in England and Wales. Nothing much to celebrate, you might think, but this letter, issued by Mike Talbot, Head of the Traffic Signs Division, heralded the beginning of the end for one of the government's most cherished projects: the metrication of Britain's two million-plus road and footpath signs.

Just two years before this letter was written, the government had planned to convert Britain's road signs to metric in 2006. Later, that target date was postponed to 2008, then 2011. Yet on 23 February 2006, the government decided to completely abandon this hare-brained scheme. The purpose of this article is to tell the story of "The Battle of the Mile". In doing so, I hope I shall provide a measure (Imperial of course) of encouragement to all others who are actively engaging the European Union in battle today to remove its alien influence on our nation.

It was back in May 1965 that Harold Wilson announced the Government's "hope" that Britain would go metric, but this was later presented as a Government "decision". Ironically, it was another Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, who helped to trigger the government's decision to abandon its proposed programme to substitute kilometres for miles, and metres for yards, on our roads.

In 2000 and 2001, members of BWMA noticed that some local authorities were beginning to

erect distance signs in metres: 'Give Way - 100 metres', 'Road Humps for 600 metres' and the like. John Gardner, BWMA's Director researched the subject and discovered, by wading through the thick undergrowth of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSGRD), that this was actually unlawful. The TSGRD only authorised metric units on bridge height and road width signs, not for distances; and even then, the heights/widths had to be shown in feet and inches as well.

BWMA members began seeing more and more metric signs going up. We began writing letters to local councils. A few complied and changed their unauthorised metric signs into miles, yards, feet or inches. Others claimed there was 'no money in the budget' to change their signs. Worse, other councils said they were not going to change them at all because, they said, the government is soon 'going to proceed' with plans to make all signs metric. That was true - the Department for Transport, (DfT) had a team of bureaucrats planning exactly when and how this 'metric changeover' (which would have cost around £1 billion) would happen.

That was the moment when a few of us got together to plan, a 'direct action' campaign to highlight the continued erection of these illegal metric signs. Active Resistance to Metrication, (A.R.M.) was formed and, as its founder and Chairman, I was proud to be involved in our first ever action, a Friday evening raid on fourteen illegal metric road signs in Northampton, on 23rd June 2001. They were removed and flung in a ditch ten miles away. The council was informed on Monday morning. Previously, they had sworn they would not remove their unauthorised metric signs. Now, however, it was just a few weeks later that they admitted their error - and erected brand spanking new signs in yards.



Two of the Northampton signs, deposited in undergrowth.

There followed a spate of similar direct actions which caused a huge amount of public interest. Our Secretary, Tony Bennett, managed to get himself arrested seven times in connection with the removal or amendment of metric road signs. Twice was Tony formally charged with an offence. On the first occasion, British Airports Authority withdrew their evidence, forcing the police to drop the case and enabling Tony to claim his costs from the Crown Prosecution Service.

On the second occasion, Tony was convicted by District Judge Kelly at Maidstone Magistrates Court of the offences of theft and criminal damage in relation to his amendment and/or removal of 40 metric road signs erected by Transco along a stretch of a new gas pipeline. He was ordered to do a total of 100 hours community service. Tony appealed his convictions and the result was that the theft charge was quashed, but on the criminal damage charge his conviction was upheld because a tiny speck of black paint had dribbled from underneath a plate he had affixed, reading "400 yards", over the previous "400m" reading.

The four judges and magistrates at the Crown Court headed by Judge Simpson, sentenced Tony to an Absolute Discharge. They said his offence was one of "minimal gravity", and made no order of costs. During the trial, the Transco employee who erected the metric signs was told by Judge Simpson that in future he must ensure that all signs must display distances in yards or miles.

It was the publicity surrounding this case that led directly to Mike Talbot sending out his circular on 12 July 2002 to every single authority in England, Wales and Scotland, reminding them that all road distance signs must be in Imperial units.

The bureaucrats at the DfT inched forward with their plans for metrication - until February 2006, when Labour's Neil Kinnock joined forces with the Conservatives' Lord Howe to issue a bizarre statement claiming that Britain would be regarded as a backward country if we didn't convert all our road signs to metric before the 2012 Olympics.

Later that week, the issue came up on BBC's *Question Time*, held in Milton Keynes. A questioner asked: 'Do the panel agree with Neil Kinnock?' Four panellists ridiculed Kinnock. The fifth panellist was Alistair Darling, then the Transport Secretary; when he announced, "We're not going to do it" i.e. metricate Britain's roads, he was cheered to the rafters. And that was the moment the mile was saved.

But in truth, it was Mike Talbot's letter which ended the sneaky erection of metric distance signs, so it is the 'Glorious Twelfth' of July that we'll celebrate this year. With a pint, of course.



Derek Norman, bottom right, assisting Tony Bennett in the amendment of metric pedestrian signs on Portsmouth seafront, 30 October 2001.

Despite Mike Talbot's letter, some administrative authorities have continued to erect metric signs and this has required the continued use of a team of voluntary sympathisers that reconnoitre the country and report the location of unlawful metric signs to ARM. The furthest distant of these "spot-ers" is Donald Heigh of Dunfirmline, an ardent supporter.

ARM has amended or replaced about 2,500 unlawful metric signs throughout the UK, and to see virtually every action, visit the *Gazetteer* on our website www.activeresistance.org.uk

The above article is reprinted in tribute to Derek Norman, who died on 6 June, aged 88. His daughter Vanda said "He passed on D Day, which was very dear to his heart due to his RAF service. Fittingly, a Lancaster bomber flew straight passed his window the day before, whilst he was wearing his RAF T-shirt".

In addition to his activities in ARM, Derek served on the BWMA Committee for fifteen years, and was Chairman of the Campaign for a Referendum on European Constitution.

The Euro Realist is an email newsletter, renamed *The Realist* following the EU referendum. It is available on request by emailing: euorealistnl@aol.com

Letter from David Felwick, Managing Director of Waitrose, to BWMA, 20 January 1998

Thank you for your letter of 9 January in which you describe your wish to see the retention of existing UK imperial measures. Whilst acknowledging the appeal to the heart, our commercial heads tell us that the approach which you suggest is not well-founded in the light of our closer links to Europe.

The arguments for transition to metric quantities as an element of our integration into the European Union and in the context of world trade are well understood and we have long accepted them. In fact, it has been an irritation and cost to us that there has been a lack of political will to see the process brought to a conclusion in an orderly and more timely fashion.

The great majority of our products are now packed in metric quantities. Furthermore, almost all of our business 'behind the scenes' (in terms of equipment, services, building and other matters) is entirely in metric terms.

We are very conscious, too, that there is a complete generation which has now grown up educated in the metric system and with little understanding of traditional imperial measures. Equally, we acknowledge that some older people find the transition difficult.

While the education of the public in general is clearly the responsibility of Government, it is our intention to help by informing our customers as the change takes place and by ensuring that our ticketing, labelling and other point of sale material is as simple and as accessible as we can make it. We have made it our business for some time now to show equivalent metric prices so that our customers are progressively becoming used to the comparisons, as they have to whenever they travel abroad.

There certainly will be a cost to the completion of the change to metric quantities but against this must be set the continuing inefficiencies which have prevailed now for decades in coping with dual measurements. Any argument that such changes are of their nature 'inflationary' is unfounded since prices are adjusted to take account of the change in pack quantity.

Moreover, there are already whole ranges of products which have converted, or more recently been launched, which are packed in litres or kilogrammes and there is no evidence that customers are not fully happy with these. Indeed milk, to which you refer, is now something of an oddity in that UHT milk is all sold in metric quantities as indeed is fresh milk in some parts of the country. It is only for fresh milk doorstep deliveries and sale in some supermarkets (including, for the time being, Waitrose) that pints are still used.

Our plans to complete the conversion to metric quantities for the sale of loose goods are well laid, as I am sure they are in the rest of the retail trade. That we have not yet done so is purely a reflection of the many other initiatives in which we are involved and other priorities, it does not in any way suggest a reluctance or unhappiness in complying with the requirements of the law, and therefore we are unable to support your campaign.

BWMA gratefully records the Patronage of the late The Hon. Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP, Lord Shore, Vice-Admiral Sir Louis Le Bailly, KBE, CB, Lord Monson and Sir Patrick Moore, CBE

And the Honorary Membership of the late John Aspinall, Nirad C Chaudhuri CBE, Jennifer Paterson CBE, Leo McKern AO, Norris McWhirter CBE, Fred Dibnah MBE, Sir Julian Hodge, KStG, KStJ, Bernard Levin CBE, Dr Charles H Sisson CH, DLitt, Fritz Spiegl, F S Trueman OBE, Sir Rowland Whitehead, Bt, George MacDonald Fraser OBE, Beryl Cook OBE, John Michell, David Shepherd MBE, Keith Waterhouse CBE, Dick Francis CBE, Prof. Antony Flew, Trevor Bailey CBE, Prof. Richard Holmes CBE, Michael Barry OBE, Max Bygraves OBE, Christopher Martin-Jenkins MBE, Candida Lycett Green, Roy Faiers, RWF Poole, MBE, Christopher Booker, Sir Roger Scruton, Peter Alliss, CBE, Jonathan Myles-Lea, Robin Page, George Logan

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