

The Yardstick

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BWMA gratefully records the Patronage of the late Lord Shore 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, David Shepherd, MBE

Increased mileage

To maintain awareness of events at home and abroad, BWMA has subscribed to a media and news service that seeks out references to metrication internationally. This is proving to be of great value, and this issue contains three examples of articles picked up from Australia and Ireland.

At home, our recently released *Analysis of Local Authority responses to "Metric Martyrs" ruling, as applied to parking enforcement* has been sent to every Trading Standards Authorities in the UK. We have urged Trading Standards Authorities to raise the growing doubts over the "hierarchy of Acts" - and with it the Thoburn conviction - with their national co-ordinating body LACORS and the Department for Trade & Industry.

In February, a combined effort of BWMA, Active Resistance to Metrication and the Metric Martyrs Defence Fund saw off in style a campaign by Neil Kinnock and the UK Metric Association to commit the government to metric road signs in time for the 2012 Olympics. Those representing BWMA included Warwick Cairns on Sky News, Vivian Linacre on Radio 5 and David Delaney on BBC West Midlands. Tony Bennett and Neil Herron were also active. In a Teletext poll, 96% of 1,800 callers opposed the scrapping of the mile, and the press was highly critical of Mr Kinnock's proposals.

The battle was won when Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Transport, said on BBC Question Time: "You know, of all the many complaints I receive from members of the public about transport, I have had not one complaint about our road signs being in miles ... The cost would be around £600 to £700 million ... You know, I can be very helpful and tell you that we're not actually going to be doing it".

To help celebrate, but also to keep in mind the relentless nature of our foe, we enclose Vivian Linacre's paper on the Metric Despotism.

John Gardner, Director

Annual General Meeting & Conference

Saturday 6th May 2006

Victory Services Club, Trafalgar Room

63 Seymour Street, London W2 2HF Tel: 020 7616 8305
(off Edgware Road, just north of Marble Arch))

AGM 10.30 for 11.00am

Conference 1.30 for 2.00am

**Speakers: Ashley Mote MEP, www.ashleymote.co.uk
Guy Herbert, General Secretary, No2ID, www.no2id.net**

Admission for Conference: £5 payable on the day

Lunch facilities available at the Club

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, from all manner of businesses and the general public. BWMA is financed by member subscriptions and donations.

Membership is £12 per year. Cheques or postal orders payable to "BWMA", 11 Greensleeves Avenue, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 8BJ

USA: In August 2005, the US government National Institute for Standards and Technology issued the following statement to the US Metric Association, acknowledging lack of support for its proposals to introduce compulsory metric conversion for packaged foods and goods:

“The proposal to amend FPLA has not been introduced through the Department of Commerce primarily because we have not been successful in persuading the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) to drop its opposition to voluntary metric only labeling. Because FMI is animate in its opposition (and it is very influential in D.C.) it is unlikely that we will be successful at getting the proposal submitted to Congress in the foreseeable future. I must add that we have not been successful in gaining widespread support for the proposal from other industrial organizations either.

“We have met with several associations of manufacturers and have been in contact with the major standards organization and none has expressed a willingness to publicly support the proposed amendment. We have also met with several major retail and food corporations and while they responded that they do not oppose the amendment, they are not willing to publicly support it. Except for Krogers, which has publicly opposed the amendment at the two forums we have held, the universal response from retailers is that they support voluntary metric only labeling but they do not want to provide letter or take any other "out-front" public position in support of a metric issue. While I fully respect industry's position, you know and I know that Congress will not move forward on the basis of neutral "support." Since most of the companies we contact say they are neutral on the issue that should be taken as a positive sign. That alone however will not overcome the strength of FMI's opposition.

“As you know, I have to work through the system since, as a Federal employee, I am forbidden from personally contacting or lobbying Congress; however, I will continue to work on this effort everyday and will do so until we see FPLA amended. This is the only way it will happen unless a trade association or an individual approaches their Congressman or Senator and persuades them to introduce the amendment on their own”.

*Ken Butcher, Chairman, NIST Metric Group
Gaithersburg, Maryland*

BBC GETS IT RIGHT, FOR ONCE

Fabian Olins, December 2005

Towards the end of November, I was contacted by BBC Radio Cambridge to participate in a telephone interview. To my surprise, the interviewer, clearly a young man, was sympathetic to the concept of retention of traditional weights and measures as a matter of consumer choice.

The interviewer began by commenting that he had attempted to buy a set of imperial Allen keys but had been unable to do so, the retailer explaining that these were no longer made as metric had replaced imperial. This apparently had led him to conduct some research into the changeover and he had discovered some extraordinary side effects including the impossibility of obtaining imperial sized knitting needles as told by one lady.

After a few introductory remarks and requesting a short summary of the objectives of the BWMA, the interviewer produced his star witness, the lady who looking for imperial sized knitting needles found that they were obtainable only in charity shops and even there they were treated as contraband and secreted in the back room in defiance of official policy. It was probably this anecdote which had led him to contact the BWMA. We agreed that purchasing a perfectly harmless object had thus been turned into a clandestine activity.

Prompted by the interviewer I was able to make such points as the overwhelming preference of consumers of all ages and in all walks of life for traditional weights and measures this despite the fact that the choice between the two systems had been available for over 100 years, the cultural imperial pretensions of the EU and the slipperiness of the UKMA. Throughout all of this, the interviewer, instead of interrupting and contradicting me which I would have expected, made favourable and supportive comments.

All in all a welcome change from the normal BBC attitude – but one must make allowances for the fact that it was local, not national, radio.

For those interested by the way, imperial Allen keys are available. They are sold quite openly on the web by www.DIYtools.co.uk and possibly by others.

Irish Times, 7 January 2006: Legal chop for butchers who flout EU price rule

Butcher shops which fail to comply with price display regulations will face prosecution by the Director of Consumer Affairs, Carmel Foley.

A survey of 106 butcher shops carried out by Ms Foley's inspectors in October found that only 40 per cent complied with EU price regulations. However, a follow-up survey of non-compliant shops in November and December found compliance had increased to 75 per cent.

The tradition in the butcher trade was to sell meat by reference to the pound in weight. However EU law requires that prices be shown in metric to facilitate comparisons, meaning prices must be shown first in kilos. Ms Foley said butchers had been made aware of this, and would face prosecution if they failed to adhere to the rule. "A judge can fine a butcher up to €3,000 per breach of this price regulation," she said. "Butchers can continue to display the price in pounds, but this must be secondary to the kilo price."

Ms Foley's inspectors will carry out another survey in the coming months. Associated Craft Butchers, which represents 60 per cent of the butcher trade, said 75 per cent compliance with the law was "quite high". "We are encouraging all our members to comply with this regulation and show the price in kilos first," said Pat Brady, chief executive of the organisation.

Mr Brady stressed however that failure to display the prices correctly in butcher shops was different from doing so in a supermarket. "The consumer in a butcher shop can ask about a price - this is the critical difference," he said. By showing the price in pounds, butchers were not deliberately misleading consumers; it was just custom, he added. Ms Foley said consumers were entitled to see metric pricing and she would be working with Associated Craft Butchers "on an education and advice programme aimed at achieving full compliance".

Irish Times, 18 January 2006: Many don't know km speed limits – RAC

One year on since the introduction of metric speed limits, nearly one in three motorists did not know that 50 km/h is the speed limit within towns or cities, and 80 km/h is the limit on regional or local roads, according to a survey by the RAC. The sample survey of 100 motorists this week found that 10 per cent of respondents believed the speed limit within towns and cities was 80 km/h. Motorists were asked to state the speed limit on motorways; roads within towns/cities; and regional/roads.

The sample group was then asked to convert three commonly seen speed limit signs to mph: 60 km/h; 80 km/h; and 120 km/h. The correct answers were respectively: 37 mph; 50 mph and 75 mph. Five per cent of respondents incorrectly answered the 60 km/h question and 8 per cent were incorrect with the 80 km/h question. While nearly one in five - 19 per cent - got the 120 km/h conversion wrong, the vast majority of the wrong respondents incorrectly answered 70 mph.

The survey was carried out to coincide with the first anniversary of the introduction of metric speed limits on January 20th. According to Ailbhe Sharp, manager of the RAC School of Motoring: "The changeover to metric speed limits was carried out very successfully last year, however, we have discovered that there is a lingering lack of knowledge among a sizeable number of motorists with regard to the exact speed limit for different road types.

"When one considers that almost 80 per cent of cars on our roads have a miles per hour reading prominent on their speedometer it is clear that there are important safety implications at stake. For this first anniversary of the introduction of metric speed limits, we are urging motorists to check their knowledge of the speed limits and make sure they know how to convert all of the key speed limits to mph."

The smooth transition by local authorities last year involved authorities erecting almost 60,000 new road signs in the weeks leading up to January 20th. While the entire operation ran relatively smoothly, there has been criticism that the changeover has not been followed up with the promised review of limits. At the time the Minister for the Environment, Dick Roche, commented that the speed limit system was being brought into disrepute by limits that defied common sense.

AUSTRALIA: The Canberra Times, Editorial, 5 September 2005

Beginning with currency decimalisation in 1966 and ending with weights and measures, the Metric Conversion Board completed its task in 1981 with government support to such an extent that even rulers and scales showing only imperial measurements were prohibited imports.

Now, 24 years later, imperial seems to making a concerted comeback, with many furniture items and particularly TV monitors and computer screens being advertised in feet and inches.

Some flyers show items using both systems, however one national firm's recent 20-page brochure gave everything in inches with no mention of a centimetre anywhere. Likewise, stores display TV sets with some screen sizes in inches and others in centimetres, creating a problem to compare relative values when none of the sales staff have any idea how to convert one system to another.

The primary reason is that Americans, despite a move by President Ronald Reagan to introduce the metric system, could not cope with the change, and as they constitute the largest single market, manufacturers feel they must pander to their incomprehension of the standard adopted by most of the remaining world.

If Australia is indeed a metric nation, surely it is time for both manufacturers and retailers to recognise that fact and use such measurements to the exclusion of others.

It makes no more sense to give specifications in inches and feet than it would be to quote prices in US dollars or British pounds.

LETTER, REPRODUCED IN BWMA'S ANNUAL REPORT OF JULY 1905

"Ten thousand persons intend to make twenty million persons change their habits. The ten thousand are the men of science (by no means all), the Chambers of Commerce, and the leaders of some Trade Unions - leaders only, for the question has never been put to the vote of the mass. The twenty million are the men and women of England, with those children who are old enough to be sent shopping. Ten thousand is an over-estimate of the combined bodies who are forcing on the metric system, and twenty millions is an under-estimate of the numbers to be coerced.

"But the change is to be enacted by Parliament", it will be said. True, by a Parliament which has received from the people no authority whatever to enact the change. It came into power to oppose Home Rule and the Local Veto; not a word in any constituency having been said about changing weights and measures, and the proposed revolution never having been dreamed of by electors. And now, not having in any way consulted the nation, it is proposed that Parliament shall make a change which if put to a plebiscite or the referendum would bring millions of "Noes" amid which the few "Ayes" would be utterly lost.

"Yes, but we know better what is for the people's good than they do, and we will force them to adopt it". Exactly. That was the reason assigned in past times by the Pope and his priests, who, to secure the eternal salvation of men, forced on them prescribed beliefs. And this secular popery, like the sacred popery, assumes infallibility; since nothing less than infallibility could warrant any body of men in dictating to all mankind for all time. For once universally established, the metric system could never be changed. And this is to be done among a people who say they are self-governed!"

Herbert Spencer, Brighton, March 1899

We have received the following from David Panton, East Sussex (Oct 2005): "I have been looking at a school history book and you may enjoy two of the ludicrous metric anachronisms. In a description of Hadrian's Wall, we are told that there were "Small forts, known as milecastles, at intervals of 1.6 kilometres", but my particular favourite is "In 1665, the Five Mile Act made it illegal for a dissenting minister to come within eight kilometres of any town". My complaint is that, when metric fanatics produce rubbish such as that, it is difficult to parody them".

Mrs S Baulch has provided us with the Editorial of Country Kitchen magazine, December 2005: "On a different note, we've succumbed to the good old days, and now have imperial as well as metric measurements on all our recipes. You know how it goes in meetings. We listened to 'experts' who told us imperial was 'old hat' and no one used it any more. You, however, have told us something rather different. Thank goodness. Now all those measurements make sense, and I don't have to go through everything converting litres to pints and from kilograms to pounds!"

Just who are these 'experts'? BWMA detects the hand of recipe writer Roz Denny, a prominent member of the UK Metric Association and member of Guild of Food Writers which runs a metric campaign:

www.gfw.co.uk/campaigns/metrication.html. Another suspect is Anne Attlee who runs the Metric

Sense Campaign and is metrication spokeswoman for the National Consumers Federation.

Support from two more Members of Parliament has been identified by our colleague Stuart Delvin. On 19 October 2005, Philip Davies (Con. Shipley) wrote, "Please rest assured that I support the aims of the BWMA wholeheartedly". On 31 October Theresa Villiers (Con. Chipping Barnet) wrote, "I very much appreciate the importance of preserving imperial measurements. I agree that there is an overlap here with my campaign on the Routemaster bus. In both cases, we are striving to defend traditional methods that work well and have come under attack from misguided modernisers".

Please note our address

(this replaces the PO Box)

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