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BWMA gratefully records the Patronage of the late The Hon. Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP and 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, F S Trueman, OBE, Sir Rowland Whitehead, Bt, George MacDonald Fraser, OBE, Beryl Cook, OBE, John Michell, David Shepherd, MBE, Keith Waterhouse, CBE

One step forward, one step back

On 16 November, Lord Drayson, Minister of State for Science and Innovation at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, signed statutory instruments 3045 and 3046 which omitted from the Weights and Measures Act 1985 the expiry date of 31 December 2009 for supplementary indications. This brings the campaign for supplementary indications to a successful close, at least for the time being.

Yet, in resolving one problem, the government has reopened another. The statutory instruments rely, in part, on the European Communities Act 1972 for their power to authorise supplementary indications, which the 1985 Act, as amended previously, would otherwise withdraw. Thus, the government has used an old Act to reverse a later one, which is precisely what caused the metric dispute in the first place. This is discussed further on the fourth page of this issue.

De-consultation

This issue contains BWMA's response to the Department for Transport's proposal to make metric mandatory on bridge height signs, alongside imperial. While casting an eye over the government's *Code of Practice on Consultation*, we noted the following paragraph: "Ministers retain their existing discretion not to conduct formal consultation exercises under the terms of the Code ... This Code is not intended to create a commitment to consult on anything, to give rise to a duty to consult, or to be relied on as creating expectations that the Government will consult in any particular case".

Fortunately, the proposal's consultation document found that mandatory metric height signs will have, "... no impact on race equality ... gender equality ... [or] human rights".

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, 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", 41 Greensleeves Avenue, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 8BJ

BWMA response to proposals by the Department for Transport to make metric height and width restriction signs mandatory, alongside imperial, 1 December 2009

To: Richard Creese, Traffic Signs Policy Branch, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London

Our Association wishes to respond to the above consultation, with specific reference to the use of dual imperial-metric height and width restriction signs. BWMA is a non-profit organisation that campaigns for the retention of British weights and measures.

According to the Department for Transport, the purpose of mandatory dual imperial-metric signs is to reduce the incident of bridge strikes. However, DfT's proposal and accompanying evidence provides no theory or explanation as to why signs in both feet and inches and metres would dissuade a driver from driving into a low bridge, anymore than signs giving restrictions in feet and inches.

Such accidents happen for two reasons:

i) Height or width restriction signs *are not seen*. This can occur because the driver is using a mobile phone, suffering from overtiredness, or that the sign itself is obscured (e.g. by foliage). Adding metric figures to a height sign will not avert a bridge strike in these type of instances.

ii) The driver does see the sign, but makes a *conscious decision to proceed* because he regards it as safe. This can occur when the vehicle has been overloaded without the driver's knowledge, thus raising its height, or when the bridge has a narrow arch, causing the edge of the vehicle to strike, rather than the top. Again, metric information would make no difference, since the height restriction, already known to the driver, is being disregarded intentionally.

The nearest DfT comes to providing a rationale is the statement: "... *approximately 10–12% of bridge strikes involved foreign lorries. This is disproportionately high in terms of the number of foreign lorries on the road network*" (paragraph 55). We interpret this to mean that DfT believes a possible cause of bridge strikes is that foreign lorry drivers are educated in metric; therefore, metric information is a solution.

Such reasoning is unlikely to be correct for two reasons:

First, foreign lorry drivers are more likely than British lorry drivers to be involved in *all manner* of accidents and driving offences. According to government and police sources (e.g. VOSA), foreign lorry drivers have lower standards of training, a lower regard for the law, drive excessive hours and suffer more fatigue. This has been acknowledged by the Road Safety Minister Jim Fitzpatrick:

"Enforcement figures show that heavy goods vehicles from overseas are more likely to be unroadworthy, overloaded or being driven in excess of drivers' hours rules than their UK counterparts" (October 2008).

Therefore, a higher incidence of bridge strikes by foreign lorry drivers need not be significant; rather, it is a reflection of a wider trend.

Second, use of measurements for height and width restrictions is not intuitive. An example of intuitive use is estimating someone's height; British people can estimate a person's height in feet and inches but not in metric, and vice-versa for continental Europeans. In the case of height and width restrictions, however, the driver is not being asked to estimate what 13 feet or 4.4 metres looks like, so whether the driver has a background in imperial or metric is irrelevant. Signs remove the need for estimation by providing drivers with numbers that can be *compared*. The driver compares the number on the sign to the number displayed inside his cab. Aside from the two circumstances described above (i and ii), we see no reason why a driver of a 14' 3" lorry should drive at a 13' 9" bridge any more than a driver of a 4.5m lorry should drive at a 4.3m bridge.

In view of the above points, we wish also to respond to **Question 12**; "Does the draft impact assessment cover all the costs and benefits arising from the proposals?" We have asked DfT for its research or information on the types of signs (imperial-only or dual imperial/metric) that were displayed on bridges struck by lorries, British and foreign driven. DfT replied: "*The Department does not hold information on the signing in place at locations where bridge strikes have occurred, nor has such research been carried out*" (email, 10 November 2009).

The draft impact assessment cannot be said to be meaningful without this research, and we have expressed this view to the Consultation Coordinator.

Conclusion

Our Association does not oppose different units for different purposes, but we can oppose use of different units for the *same* purpose. Dual height and width restriction signs are one such instance: the government is proposing is to use *different systems concurrently for the same purpose*.

Therefore, we make two counter-proposals:

- That the government withdraws its plan to make metric signs mandatory
- That it instead explores the logical alternative which is to simply remove optional metric signs and use feet and inches solely. The advantage of this is that it removes uncertainty from the minds of drivers as to the measurement system on British signs, and uses one system for one purpose.

Yours sincerely, etc

BWMA complaint regarding non-compliance of DfT's proposals with the Code of Practice on Consultation, 1 December 2009

To: Lec Napal, Consultation Co-Ordinator, Department for Transport, Great Minster House, London

The Department for Transport is conducting a consultation on making metric information mandatory on all height and width restriction road signs, alongside existing feet and inches (currently, metric is optional). The benefit is said by DfT to be a reduction in the number of bridge strikes, where the roof of a lorry impacts the underside of the bridge.

According to the government's regulatory reform agenda, consultations should involve impact assessments, supported by an evidence base, to demonstrate all the costs and benefits arising from proposals. Accordingly, we have asked DfT for its research and information on the existing relationship between dual imperial/metric and imperial-only signs, and bridges struck by lorries. DfT replied:

"The Department does not hold information on the signing in place at locations where bridge strikes have occurred, nor has such research been carried out" (email, 10 November 2009).

We do not see how an impact assessment can be said to demonstrate or evidence the benefits of dual imperial-metric signs when no research exists to compare the effects of existing dual signs. Without such research, the Department for Transport is merely *asserting* that metric information will reduce bridge strikes. Indeed, it may be the case that showing metric alongside existing imperial increases the risk of accidents by, for instance, delaying driver reaction.

On this basis, this proposal should not be considered further.

Yours sincerely, etc

Parliamentary Questions by Philip Hollobone MP, and answers by Sadiq Khan, Minister of State, 23 November 2009

Philip Hollobone MP (Conservative, Kettering):

To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport, what proposals his Department has issued on making metric measurements mandatory on road signs warning of, or imposing height restrictions; and what the (a) status of and (b) evidential basis for such proposals is.

To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport, what information his Department holds on the nature of the signage in place at locations where vehicles have struck bridges.

To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport, what research has been (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated by his Department on the adequacy of the signage in place at locations where vehicles have struck bridges; and whether any such research has been taken into account in the formulation of proposals to make metric measurements mandatory on road signs warning of impending height restrictions.

Sadiq Khan, Minister of State:

The Department for Transport is currently consulting on amendments to Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSRGD) which include the mandatory use of both imperial and metric units on road signs warning of or imposing height restrictions. These signs are currently prescribed in TSRGD but the use of dual-unit signing is discretionary. The consultation document is on the Department's website at the following address and the consultation closes on 24 December 2009:

www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/trafficsignsamendmentsreqs/

Evidence presented by Network Rail suggests that 10-12 per cent of bridge strikes involved foreign lorries and this is disproportionately high. Current policy has also been informed by a 2004 TRL research report *Measures to Reduce the Frequency of Over-Height Vehicles Striking Bridges: Final Report*, which covers signing issues. The report is on the Department's website at the following address:

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tss/research/educethevehiclestrikingbridges/urestoreducethefrequency4172.pdf

The consultation proposals are intended to help reduce the risk of bridge strikes by foreign lorry drivers who may misunderstand imperial-only measurements.

There are no centrally-held records on the nature of traffic signs placed for all locations where vehicles have struck bridges.

More missing evidence

BWMA also asked to see the consultative document and associated materials (findings, evidence, impact assessment, etc) relating to the 1980s decision to allow *optional* metric height and width measurements alongside imperial. The Department for Transport replied on 11 November 2009: "With regard to the information that you have requested, I have been informed by the Department's Records Management Unit that all of the paper files that I had identified as likely to hold this information have been destroyed. The documents ... would have been produced as a result of the revision of the 1981 Regulations and I can only presume that the officers involved had requested that the files be kept for a period of 15 years or less. Nowadays, we are able to save all papers etc electronically and therefore storage space is not a concern; I regret that I am unable to help in this instance".

Supplementary Indications

Here is an excerpt of statutory instrument 3046 (our emphasis):

The Secretary of State, being a Minister designated (a) for the purposes of section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 (b) in relation to units of measurement to be used for economic, health, safety, or administrative purposes, in exercise of the powers conferred by that subsection, makes the following Regulations:

... 3 — (1) In section 8(5A) of the Weights and Measures Act 1985 (d) (which allows the use for trade of supplementary indications up to and including 31 December 2009), omit “up to and including 31 December 2009”.

The government is nullifying the Weights and Measures Act 1985, in so far as it applies to supplementary indications, by way of a statutory instrument passed under the 1972 Act. This is the same technique that outlawed imperial units for use in trade, leading to the conviction of Steven Thoburn and other traders. Repealing or negating an Act of Parliament by an older Act goes against British constitutional law which requires that, when incompatibility exists, the latter Act takes precedence. Clearly, there is incompatibility caused by statutory instrument 3046: the 1985 Act (as is) renders supplementary indications illegal; the 1972 Act makes them legal.

The government's use of the 1972 Act is surprising given that, having outlawed imperial units in this way, it realized subsequently that the same principle also endangered Acts designed to impose government fines outside of the courts. A letter from the Home Office in November 2006 backtracks: *“If, and to the extent that, a modern statute clearly provides for such penalties, it is a necessary implication that any provision in any earlier enactment to contrary effect does not apply. Courts and tribunals are obliged to implement the modern statute”.*

Since 2002, therefore, we have switched from implied repeal (which, up until that point, had lasted for centuries); to a hierarchy of acts, to protect Britain's implementation of the EC metrication directive and, by implication, Britain's membership of the EU; back to implied repeal, to maintain the government's power to seize private money and property without allowing affected parties appeal to the courts; and now back to the hierarchy of acts, to preserve the European Union's export trade. All of which suggests that the rule of law in Britain is permanently broken.

Readers with an internet connection who wish to inspect the statutory instruments may do so that these locations:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2009/uksi_20093045_en_1

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2009/uksi_20093046_en_1

Reply from Peter Mason, Chief Executive, National Measurement Office, to BWMA letter of 24 August 2009:

Last issue recorded our letter of 24 August to the Peter Mason, Chief Executive of National Measurement Office, Teddington, Middlesex; an extract is produced here for convenience:

Dear Mr Mason

... I draw your attention to paragraph three on page two of the [government's] 2005 letter:

“As for the much smaller physical trade in precious metals, this can be conducted in either troy or metric units, whichever the purchaser and seller find convenient. We would thus suggest that the continued use of the troy ounce in these contexts is not in practice a barrier to trade between Member States”.

You will be aware that the above practice has not been applied to pounds and ounces for foods, etc. It has been the government's view for a number of years that one authorised set of measurements is needed for consumer protection, as illustrated by this statement from 1996:

“It was considered that if some products were sold in imperial units and others in metric, this would hinder the consumer's ability to make value-for-money comparisons, and would open up the scope for fraudulent trading”.

... We would be grateful if you could explain this contradiction.

Mr Mason's reply, 6 October 2009:

“Thank you for your letter dated 24 August concerning a reference to the trade in precious metals in the Government's letter of 14 December 2005 to the European Commission. I am sorry for the delay in replying. I can confirm that the Government's view remains that a single system of measurement is necessary for ensuring consumer protection.

“With reference to the comments you highlight in the 2005 letter, I should point out that the trade in precious metals mentioned in the text of the letter refers to a trade which takes place predominantly between Members of the London Bullion Market Association, that is to say major international banks, and where transactions are often across borders. In this case we would not regard consumer protection as a determining factor. However, you may be interested to note that the vast majority of those transactions use the troy ounce. I hope that this is helpful”.

Analysis

The key word in Mr Mason's letter is *predominantly*. This means that *not all* gold trade is at the international level, and that *some* is at individual level. A search on Ebay at any one time reveals thousands of auctions for gold chains and bullion coins, to say nothing of 'cash for gold' dealers. An equivalent argument might be that as the vast majority of oil is purchased in tankers by governments and corporations, consumer protection is not needed when selling to the motorist at the pump.

Clearly, the contradiction is unresolved: the government says that metric is necessary to protect consumers when buying bananas at 40 pence per pound, but not when buying a Krugarrand at £650 per troy ounce (£9,479 per avoirdupois pound).

Either the government is correct, and that metric is necessary to protect consumers, in which case it is guilty of appalling neglect in allowing the consumers of precious metals to be exposed to fraud and confusion; or the government is wrong (as BWMA believes), in which the case for metrication is non-existent.

Cadbury's Roses downsized

454 gram boxes of Roses, formerly labelled "454g 1 lb", have been reduced to 400 grams. A count revealed that there were 36 chocolates in the 400g box, compared to 44 (slightly smaller) chocolates in the 454g box. BWMA has written to Cadbury's for an explanation.

Long-term readers of *The Yardstick* will be aware that this is part of the Great Gram Scam, whereby imperial packages are converted to smaller metric sizes. Previous examples include Fox's Mints, reduced from 227g (8oz) to 200g (42 to 37 sweets), and Birds Eye Garden Peas, reduced from 454g/1lb to 400g. Pringles, when challenged on downsizing from 56 grams (2 oz) to 50 grams, said: "*The 56g can was downcounted to 50gm a year ago, there are 3 less crisps per can, we didn't increase the price, but believe that Pringles still provide good value*".

Freedom of Information

Reply from Information Commissioner's Office, 28 August 2009, to BWMA letter of 24 August

Thank you for your letter of August 24 in which you express your dissatisfaction that a decision notice has not been issued following your complaint to the Information Commissioners Office.

I have looked at the case and the responses provided by the case officer, Mr Hogan and his manager Ms Clements and whilst I can understand the replies may be frustrating I do agree that the case has been dealt with appropriately and should remain closed.

In dealing with all of the complaints that we receive we must consider the steps that could be taken by the public authority in the particular case, that would go into any decision notice, as well as taking into account the outcome required to ensure appropriate information is released. [*Editor's comment: so?*]

In this case it is clear that you have now received all the information you requested originally. I understand the argument presented that the information was only released following the passage of time but nevertheless I do not feel that the formal decision notice is appropriate to deal with this case at this point.

Whilst I am aware that this may be a disappointing outcome for you I am not prepared to agree to your complaint being reopened.

If you remain dissatisfied with the way in which your concerns have been dealt with then you can approach the Ombudsman via the address supplied below

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP.

All complaints to the Ombudsman must be made through your MP. The helpline number is 0845 015 4033 should you wish to make further enquiries.

Andy Laing

Assistant Commissioner - Head of Casework

BWMA reply 10 September 2009

Dear Mr Laing

Thank you for your letter of 28 August 2009.

Your description of our complaint - "the information was only released following the passage of time" - is incorrect. Our complaint is that the government withheld information until after certain events had occurred, so to affect the value of that information. Consequently, your reason for not issuing a Decision Notice ("...it is clear that you have now received all the information you requested originally") is unreasonable; having the information *now* is the problem, and is why we are making a complaint.

Yours is the third reply from the Information Commissioner's Office that fails to acknowledge our grounds of complaint: on 8 June 2009, Christopher Hogan gave an incorrect reason for why the government released the information; on 23 July, Pam Clements pointedly ignored our appeal's line of reasoning.

While it is the ICO's prerogative to decline a Decision Notice in certain circumstances, it is not the ICO's prerogative to mis-describe a complaint to make it fit those circumstances.

We do not understand why the Head of Casework and his staff at the Information Commissioner's Office would act in this way. Nevertheless, we extend to you a further opportunity to address our complaint. Please take the time to read the correspondence carefully and fully, and deal only with the material points.

Yours sincerely, etc

Reply from Information Commissioner's Office, 29 September 2009

I am writing in response to your letter of 10 September again requesting that your case be reconsidered in light of the issues presented.

I fully understand that the point you would like to make in that DIUS supplied inappropriate argument at the time of the original request however it is my role to

review the actions of the case officer and the team leader in dealing with your complaint. I am also to consider the proportionate response to the case in question and determine if the case should be reopened.

I reiterate that I have taken into account the fact that the information requested has been released and consequently there are no steps that would be required of the public authority that would warrant a formal decision notice.

As a result I am of the view that the case will remain closed. I am sorry that this will be another frustrating reply but as explained in previous correspondence you can approach the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint.

The contact details for the office of the Ombudsman are ... The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP. The helpline number is 0845 015 4033 should you wish to make further enquiries.

Andy Laing
Assistant Commissioner - Head of Casework

BWMA reply 28 November 2009

Dear Mr Laing

Thank you for your letter of 28 September 2009.

We are still not satisfied with your response.

The problem exists because Christopher Hogan did not record the correct reason for why the government released the information; instead, he chose one that matched one of the six reasons listed by the ICO for which a Decision Notice need not be issued.

I trust you are aware that this list has a purpose: if a reason fits, a Decision Notice is not issued; if the reason does not fit, a Decision Notice *is* issued. By choosing a reason to fit the list, rather than the actual one, Mr Hogan was making not a technical error, but an error that contravenes fundamentally the procedure that he is duty bound to undertake.

I do not see how Mr Hogan could have made such a mistake, given that the government was entirely candid about its reason. But even if his action was inadvertent, the same cannot be said for Ms Pam Clements, who ignored the mistake when we drew her attention to it. Given that she was obliged to deal with our complaint, we are entitled to regard her behaviour as dishonest.

You say that your job is to address mal-conduct by staff; yet, you have given no indication that you have done so.

With reference to your statement, "*I reiterate that I have taken into account the fact that the information requested has been released*", you are again avoiding the point that we have raised under the ICO complaint process. It is not the release of the information that is salient, but the timing in relation to political and legal

developments. Like Ms Clements, you are avoiding acknowledging the government's stated actions and motives, presumably because you are aware that to do so would oblige you to follow ICO procedure and issue a Decision Notice.

Please explain why you are so reluctant to follow ICO procedures.

Please also provide an explanation as to how our readers, as members of the public, can have confidence in the Information Commissioner's Office, in light of the above.

Yours sincerely, etc

To be continued ...

Mail on Sunday outs the BBC, 30 Aug 2009

"*Today Programme* host Evan Davis has helped let the cat out of the bag. Twice in the space of ten days he referred to distance and speed - in a British context - in kilometres and kilometres per hour respectively. A call to the BBC to ask if the Corporation has abandoned imperial measurements altogether elicits this patronising response: 'There are no hard-and-fast rules about the use of metric and imperial measurements and our presenters aim to use language that suits both the programme's audiences as well as their individual presentation styles'".

The Garden

Member Rosemary Wickenden has sent in a clipping from *The Garden* magazine; in it, the Editor Ian Hodgson states: "*The Garden* has reinstated imperial equivalents for metric units. I have to admit, it is easier to visualise a 5in pot than a 13cm one; just another indicator of the need to keep a foot in the past, and a finger on the pulse of the future".

Fabian Olins and Eddie Worster

Two prominent BWMA members have died recently. Fabian Olins was a valued and longstanding Committee member of BWMA; he operated the Association's ansa-machine, and was a former treasurer. Fabian was also a successful architect, and worked for the UK Independence Party for a number of years.

Eddie Worster was a prolific letter writer, challenging companies on metric labelling. Eddie brought to one of our annual meetings two jars from the English Proven-der Company, together with prices, showing that it had downsized its dressings and sauces from 12 fl oz to 250g (8.8 fl oz), alongside a price reduction of only 11%, meaning a price rise in real terms of 17%

* * *

Stop Press: We are delighted to announce that the Rt Hon Frank Field MP is an Honorary Member of BWMA. Frank Field has been the Member of Parliament for Birkenhead since 1979, and is the author of numerous works on welfare, low pay and social issues. Frank Field chairs the Pension Reform Group, which he helped to set up in 1999.

From the Archives: *The Coin of Courtesy*, from BWMA annual report of 1906:

We have heard much lately, writes Clarence Rook in the "Daily Chronicle", about the pressing need of simplification in our weights and measures. We must adopt the metric system in order to ease our minds and increase our trade. All things, space, time and beer, should be reduced to decimals or, as Lord Randolph Churchill phrased it, "damned dots". We have our pottles and our firkins and our loads and our rods, and scores of measures and weights that have to the ignorant just about the precision of the countryman's definition, "about the size of a bit of chalk"; nevertheless there is something to be said for our system. Indeed, one might argue that this incessant obstacle race over the multiplication tables that we have to enter ensures a bracing of the muscles. We are always kept on the alert to fathom the relation between a pottle, a perch and a guinea - or some such absurd and fortuitous combination, and one may suspect that this tightening and strengthening of the muscles in the obstacle race is really the source of England's Greatness.

Of all the obstacles that confront the Englishman, the guinea is the most amazing. The other day an American guest inquired of me, "What is a guinea?" He had been asked for one by a circulating library. It seems an easy question to answer. But as I had been puzzling over the division of an imaginary guinea into four parts the explanation took time. It was as difficult as explaining cricket to a German - in German.

"Show me one", said the American.

I confessed that I did not possess one.

"What - not five dollars and a quarter?"

"Yes; but not a guinea. We don't have guineas in England any more"

"But you talk in guineas!"

"That's our fun", I replied lamely...

For all practical purposes the guinea - in which we talk - is the most preposterously absurd coin in the world. For it does not exist corporeally. Some few honest citizens wear spade guineas on their watch-chains. But if they tried to pass them over to the booking clerk on the Underground Railway they would be in danger of the judgment. There are no guineas in England. Yet, in imagination they exist. And never more accuse yourself of belonging to an unimaginative nation of shopkeepers! The guinea is the coin of courtesy, just because it is not a coin at all. And its preservation as an anomaly is a curious proof of the innate courtesy of the Englishman, who will face any arithmetical inconvenience rather

than put a slur on a friend. This you may see from the lists of subscriptions for the gentleman in distress. You cannot offer him the necessaries of life. When the friend falls by the wayside, it must be guineas — not sovereigns — that you supply. It is merely the analogue of that convention which regulates gifts between equals. Etiquette forbids your sending a friend a leg of mutton — that is a sovereign, the ordinary humdrum coin. But you may send him pheasants, oysters, grouse or salmon. Possibly the real explanation is that, as a matter of courtesy, you may not give a man what he could obtain at the nearest shop - it must be something that is not easily obtainable.

Now, a guinea is not easily obtainable; and the difference between offering a man a guinea and offering him a sovereign is the difference between sending a man a leg of mutton and sending him a barrel of oysters. That little silly shilling stuck onto the sovereign — that retention of the ghost of a coin long dead, and borne on a watch-chain with a locket containing a twist of great-great-auntie's hair has its significance. It is the embodiment of the Englishman's innate idealism. It is like the equally silly "Esq." which we tack on the names of friends. There are no esquires nowadays, and no guineas, but we see them with the eye of faith. And we sacrifice to our faith considerable muscular exertion, many blobs of ink, and sundry shillings that might otherwise stock our houses with cheap reprints of the World's Best Books.

You will naturally conclude that I did not put this view before my American friend. He would scarcely understand it. I led him gently to the palatial bank premises into which I hurriedly cast my weekly wage for fear I should lose it on the way home, and pointed out to him (lowering my voice discreetly, as becomes the suppliant in the Temple of Wealth): "Note that young man", I said. "He is adding up three columns of figures. There are guineas — things that won't fraternise with half-crowns, or four-shilling pieces, or florins, or half-sovereigns or sovereigns. But you will perceive that this young man is taking them in his stride. Now, what about his muscles?"

"I should conclude", said the American guest thoughtfully, "that a young man who can put twelve guineas together and make 'em dollars can do anything".

"The guinea", I explained, as we went out into Piccadilly, is the source of England's Greatness; and the American guest remained thoughtful.

John Frederick Carden Michell
(born 9 February 1933, died 24 April 2009)

2009 was a bad year for BWMA's galaxy of Patrons and Honorary Members. Of the former, we lost The Hon. Gwyneth Dunwoody MP, and of the latter no fewer than three: the playwright and journalist Keith Waterhouse CBE, the cricket umpire David Shepherd MBE and our beloved John Michell, whom *The Times* obituary on 12 May described as "the genial savant of New Age counterculture".

He was buried in Stoke Abbott churchyard, appropriately, for a devotee of Celtic mysticism, on May Day, having been brought there on a gypsy flat cart (bearing the painted sign "General Dealer") drawn by a Welsh cob named Ruby. The Service of Thanksgiving was held on 2 July in The Parish Church of All Saints, Notting Hill, close to his home which I visited while working on *The General Rule - A Guided to Customary Weights and Measures* to which he contributed invaluable. The Service featured two other Hon. Members, Candida Lycett Green who gave a Reading, and Jools Holland who provided the music, while the congregation included several others, including Richard Ingrams, founder-editor of *The Oldie*, to which John contributed a monthly column from almost its first number in February 1992 to the 243rd which was published on the day of his funeral.

John wrote more than forty books, on such subjects as alchemy, crop circles, druidism, euphonies, feng shui, geodetics, kabbalah, ley lines, megaliths, metrication (which he vociferously hated), numerology, paganism, sacred measurements, simulacra, Shakespeare's identity, Stonehenge and UFOs; but his two best were probably *The View over Atlantis* (1969) which brought him fame, and *The Dimensions of Paradise* (1987) which gave me inspiration and led to our first meeting. The author of *The Times* obituary, Allan Brown, collaborated with him on his last book, *How the World is Made - The Story of Creation According to Sacred Geometry*, finished during his last illness and now published by Thames & Hudson. *The Yardstick* will review it in our next issue.

John was brought up in a large Victorian house, appropriately called Stargroves, beneath the Wiltshire Downs near Newbury, which was later bought by his friend Mick Jagger. Among his contemporaries at Eton was Lord Moyne and Ian Cameron, father of the present Conservative Leader. Glastonbury became his spiritual home, the "New Jerusalem" (to quote Allan Brown), "the epicentre of the New Age, an expression first used by his hero William Blake in 1809"; and there he and his friends persuaded the farmer Michael Eavis to found the Glastonbury Festival on his land in 1971, creating the famous 75ft x 48ft stage - a scale model of the Pyramid of Cheops, which John claimed was an example of the "spiritual engineering" known in the ancient world.

"He just loved ideas and the possibility of another spiritual universe waiting to be discovered", to quote another friend. But, as the *Daily Telegraph* obituary on 9 May rightly concluded, "it was for his wit, original mind and capacity for friendship that he will be best remembered." BWMA has lost a brilliant champion, but his books will always sustain the cause for which we fight.

Metric sign removed at Tower Bridge

Our colleague Terence Jones has received the following from the City of London Corporation:

Dear Mr. Jones,

I write further to your complaint received by the Town Clerk's Department which has been forwarded to City Surveyor's Department for our attention as detailed below.

"Illegal signage indicating distance to tower bridge exhibition i.e. in metric and not in imperial as the law demands. Indicated on trestle type sign on west side of tower bridge. The sign should be either removed or better still translated into imperial measure. Visitors wish to see Britain, not a hotch potch of their own homes".

I can advise that my colleague Mr. Tyler visited the Tower Bridge site today and confirms that the sign to which you referred has been now removed and a replacement sign ordered. The new sign should be in place within two weeks.

Karen McSorley, City Surveyor's Department

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