

# The Yardstick

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## Metric Merchandise Manoeuvres

In *Yardstick 40*, we reported how, in February 2010, Cadbury chocolate Roses were downsized from 454 grams (previously labelled 454g 1 lb) to 400 grams. We can now report that, in August 2011, Roses were downsized *again*, from 400 grams to 350 grams.

Metrication causes a two-stage erosion of consumer protection: first, a mechanical reduction resulting from the switching from imperial to metric; second, an *incremental* downsizing enabled by the use of milli-units. Other examples include Pringles, which went from 56g (2 oz) to 50g, to 43g; and Foxes Glacier Mints, from 227g (8 oz) to 200g, to 150g.

But there's a further twist in the Great Gram Scam. In October 2011, Roses *increased* their boxes, from 350g to 420g. So, what's the catch? The latest boxes feature a prominent yellow flash declaring "**20% extra free**". So, Cadbury is advertising as 20% more a product that weighs over an ounce less than what was once its standard 1 lb weight.

Foxes Glacier Mints have done the same; recent bags have increased to 225 grams, with a prominent red strip stating: "*50% extra FREE, 225 grams for the price of 150 grams*". So, a bag that is restored, merely, to almost the previous norm is now advertised as being atypically generous.

So too, drink producers: Kestrel Super Lager and White Star Cider describe their 500ml cans as "big", yet offer *less* content than a pint. How so? Because they take as their point of comparison the arbitrary and reduced can of 440ml.

Beware metric descriptions that declare special offers; they belie the fact that even super-sized metric products never contain more, and usually much less, than the standard imperial measures that preceded them.

## New Honorary Members

We are delighted to report two new Honorary Members: Hugh Johnson, best selling author, horticulturalist and expert on wine, whose *The World Atlas of Wine* in 1971 was the first attempt to map the world's wine regions, using wine-specific cartography. And Neil Hamilton, whose recent election to the governing body of the UK Independence Party marks his re-entry into politics; Neil has been the only Trade Minister since the 1970s to support British weights and measures, and we were delighted to hear him talk at our 2011 Conference on the need for deregulation.

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", EGS Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AN

## Red Tape Challenge

The following is BWMA's curious non-correspondence with the "Red Tape Challenge Team", Better Regulation Executive, following our submission, calling for the repeal of metric regulations, on 8 May (see *Yardstick 46*):

**BWMA to Red Tape Challenge Team, 10 July 2011:** On 8 May, we sent a response to the Red Tape Challenge. However, we did not get an acknowledgement. Please can you confirm that it was received?

**Red Tape Challenge Team to BWMA, 11 July 2011:** We can confirm that we have received the BWMA submission to the Red Tape Challenge and that it is being considered alongside all other comments received in response to the Retail theme.

**BWMA to Red Tape Challenge Team, 3 September 2011:** Thank you for the confirmation that our submission was received. Please could you explain the process that you follow in relation to Red Tape Challenges, and give an idea of timescales?

**Red Tape Challenge Team to BWMA, 14 September 2011:** Themes are available for comment on the Red Tape Challenge website for 5 weeks with contributions used by government as part of producing a set of proposals on regulatory reform. These proposals are reviewed by a Ministerial 'Star Chamber' with the presumption that all burdensome regulations will go unless Departments can justify why they are needed – well-defined and necessary regulation will be kept. This process takes about three months. Departments then put their proposals to the Reducing Regulation Committee and seek policy clearance. An announcement on decisions will be published on the website, and implementation by Departments will begin. The results of the Retail Red Tape Challenge to which BWMA contributed are available now on the website at <http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/2011/07/rtc-retail-announcement>

*Editor's note: thus, the process was concluded with out any contact with BWMA, other than the two emails prompted by our reminders. The webpage referred to makes no reference to metrication, but announces the repeal merely of regulations that have been duplicated or superseded over time. In other words, no reduction of Red Tape as applied to the public.*

**BWMA to Red Tape Challenge Team, 1 October 2011:**

Please can you answer the following questions:

i) Who were the ministers in the Ministerial Star Chamber in relation to our submission?

ii) Are all public proposals put to the Ministerial Star Chamber, or is there a screening or pre-selection process?

iii) Are minutes kept of the Ministerial Star Chamber's deliberations?

iv) You explain that the Ministerial Star Chamber assumes regulations to be burdensome unless government departments can justify them; this appears to suggest that government departments can control the process by choosing which regulations to justify, and which not, thereby negating the element of 'challenge'. I would be grateful for your comments.

*No reply was received, so a reminder was sent on 29 October, followed by another reminder on 9 November 2011; then:*

**Red Tape Challenge Team to BWMA, 9 November 2011:** Rather than have an email exchange would you like to call me or pop in to the office to discuss? Gaynor Ithell, Assistant Director, RTCT, Better Regulation Executive.

**BWMA to Red Tape Challenge Team, 15 November 2011:** Thank you for the offer; however, I need written answers, as we publish correspondence for our Members to follow, in our journal *The Yardstick*

*No reply was forthcoming, so another reminder was sent on 29 November; then:*

**Red Tape Challenge Team to BWMA, 29 November:** Would you like to pop in to discuss? Best wishes, Gaynor

**BWMA to Red Tape Challenge Team, 30 November 2011:** Thank you again for your offer; however, we seek written answers, so we can publish them in our journal, *The Yardstick*, for our members to read.

*TO BE CONTINUED ...*

\* \* \*

**Deadly Decimals: BWMA letter to Department of Health, 4 January 2011 (in response to its letter of 9 November 2010, see *Yardstick 43*)**

Dear Mr Roberts

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2010, in which you say that calculations with imperial units are not straightforward and prone to greater risk of error than metric.

There are, however, risks with metric units, which fall into three categories:

- The metric system makes greater use of the decimal point, which is easy to misplace or misread; according to research, three of ten hospital drugs at risk of 10-fold dosing errors are ‘high alert’ drugs, as are all four hospital drugs at risk of 100-fold errors.
- Adherence to *Système International* means that only metric units based on multiples or sub-multiples of 1,000 are used; for example, one unit only, the milligram, lies between the gram and one *millionth* of a gram, the microgram.
- Metric’s notation prescribes confusingly similar prefixes and abbreviations; for instance, milligram and millilitre, and milligram and microgram.

The metric system, unlike the apothecary system, was not devised by medical staff for dispensing medication, but by scientists, who based it on calculations of the earth’s circumference. In contrast to imperial units, metric units have not evolved to fit the purposes for which they are used. You will see in the enclosed edition of our newsletter, *The Yardstick [43]*, numerous examples of medical errors arising from metric’s unnatural characteristics.

We believe this is a neglected issue, and ask what the Department of Health can do reduce such dosing errors; in particular:

- Does the DoH know the number of incidents each year relating to misplaced or misread decimal points, 1000-fold errors, and errors arising from confusion between micrograms, milligrams and milliliters?
- Will the DoH consider issuing a safety alert to NHS hospitals on this topic?
- Is the doctrinaire application of *Système International* actually necessary?
- Cannot apothecary units be restored where they reflect, more realistically than metric or *Système International*, actual dosages, thereby bringing units into line with their use?

Yours sincerely, etc

## **Reply from Department of Health, 30 March 2011**

Thank you for your letter dated 4 January 2011, and please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you. To answer the specific questions you raise:

The Department does not collect information on the number of incidents relating to misplaced or misread decimal points.

The Department does not have any plans to issue further safety alerts relating to weigh scales at this time.

Having issued advice to the NHS on using weighing equipment that only displays metric units where there is the potential for error, there are no plans to recommend the re-introduction of scales that display imperial units or dual display readings.

I can only reiterate the points made in the response sent to you on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010:

“... a significant number of weigh scales have been replaced. In July 2009, around only 10% of weigh scales in use still displayed imperial units. Given that the majority of equipment now displays metric units, replacing the remaining equipment is ultimately in the best interests of patient safety. Exclusively, metric units are used for all medical purposes. Drug doses are in metric, and are often calculated per patient body mass (mg/kg) or per surface area (mg/m<sup>2</sup>)”.

The onus remains with clinical and pharmacy staff at a local level, to ensure that prescriptions are written up and made up correctly, that dosages are appropriate, and to challenge where doubt as to accuracy exists. It is not the role of central Government to intervene with local level procedures.

I trust this answers your concerns.

Paul Roberts

cc. Professor RJ Smith - Director of Estates & Facilities

## **BWMA response, 26 April 2011**

Thank you for your letter of 30 March 2011. You state that the DoH does not know the number of decimal point accidents. We presume, by implication, that the DoH also does not know the number of 1000-fold errors, and errors arising from confusion between micrograms, milligrams and milliliters.

Our own research suggests that medical accidents and near-misses caused by decimal point and metric unit errors are not uncommon, and we are disappointed that DoH is declining to send out a safety alert. You explain that this is because, “...*the onus remains [at local level] to challenge where doubt as to accuracy exists*”, and that “...*it is not the role of central government to intervene with local procedures*”.

Yet, in relation to imperial units, you say the DoH has issued advice and requested changes to local

practices due to "risk of error". Please could you explain the contradiction in these two stances.

## Reply from Department of Health, 28 April 2011

Thank you for your letter dated 26th April 2011. As you can imagine the role of the Department has changed significantly recently, and continues to change, and is now rarely involved with matters at a local level.

At the time safety alerts relating to weigh scales were issued, originally in 2008, this was in response to the ongoing LACORS National Medical Weighing Project, where concerns were being highlighted in relation to equipment in use in the NHS. In particular, this related to the use of Class III scales which were considered to be inappropriate, and the safety alert required, in the "Action" section of the alert, that local NHS organisations were to ensure weigh scales used in relation to medication, treatment or diagnosis, were of the Class III type. The issue of dual reading scales being set to read metric only was in the "Other information" section of the alert.

When LACORS published their final report in July 2009, one of the recommendations was to move to equipment that is only capable of reading in metric units for medical applications. The Department took the view that to 'close the loop' on this issue, a final safety alert should be issued endorsing the LACORS recommendation. Hence, this was the advice contained in the safety alert issued in March 2010.

Given the above, I can only reiterate the points made in our previous letter:

- The Department does not collect information on the number of incidents relating to misplaced or misread decimal points, including the number 1000-fold errors and errors arising from confusion between micrograms, milligrams and millilitres.
- The Department does not have any current plans to issue further safety alerts relating to weigh scales at this time.
- It is the responsibility of clinical and pharmaceutical staff at a local level, to ensure that patient's prescriptions are both written and made up correctly, that dosages are appropriate, and to challenge where doubt as to accuracy exists.
- It is not the role of the Department of Health to produce or assess procedures that are developed at local NHS organisational level to meet local needs.

I trust this provides the necessary clarity over your concerns.

Paul Roberts

cc. Professor RJ Smith - Director of Estates & Facilities

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## Royal Pardon

*Stuart Delvin asked the government why it did not grant Steve Thoburn, convicted of selling produce by the pound, a Royal Pardon. He received a reply from one L Kurt, EU Directorate, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:*

Thank you for your letter of 19 September, concerning the prosecution of Steve Thoburn. The policy of successive administrations since 1965 has been to move to full metrication over time. This staged approach to metrication recognises the diverse needs of different groups of users, while supporting the basic aims of fair trade and consumer protection. We believe this approach continues to strike an appropriate balance between efficiency and ease of use for both business and consumers.

The policy for issuing pardons lies with the Office of Criminal Justice Reform and enforcement of weights and measures legislation is for individual trading standards departments. However, "metric martyrs" were prosecuted for using only imperial weights and measures, and refusing to use metric as well. The law requiring the use of metric units for goods sold loose has not changed. What has been under review is the question of whether imperial units may continue to be used alongside metric (so-called "supplementary indications") as is currently allowed.

This dual use was due to end after 31 December 2009, but the UK Government - by engaging positively with the European Commission and other Member States - has successfully negotiated an extension that allows the use of dual metric and imperial labelling to continue indefinitely. This is in recognition that although the UK is now substantially metric, there remain a number of people in the UK who are more familiar with or prefer to use the imperial system of measurement. Nevertheless, it remains important for competition and fair trade that business and consumers can rely on a single system of units of measurement and to that end the metric system must continue to be used as the primary unit of measurement.

## Message from our Patron, Sir Patrick Moore

Very many thanks for the latest edition of the *Yardstick*. We have come a long way, but we are very far from being safe yet. We must simply keep on telling people that what we are doing is both rational and patriotic. You have simply got to obtain pardons for all these people.

Patrick

## The Pint is saved (again)

The *Daily Mail* reported the following on 30 September 2011: *Pubs will still be allowed to serve beer in pints and grocers can carry on selling eggs by the dozen after European Union attempts to kill off traditional measures were thwarted. The Government will today claim to have beaten back a bid by Brussels to enforce a switch to metric for all food and drink labelling. Defra, the food and farming department, says the protection of imperial measures is among a raft of victories it has secured in the new EU rules.*

BWMA believed that the pint for draught alcohol had been preserved in January 2010 by EC Directive 2009/3. We therefore sought an explanation. The following is from Lynnette Falk, at the National Measurement Office, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 20 October 2011:

Thanks for your email of 1st October to DEFRA regarding the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) press release. Your enquiry has been passed to NMO as, although DEFRA have taken the lead on the negotiations of the Food Information Regulation (FIR), NMO take the lead on weights and measures issues, including quantity labelling of foods. NMO has worked closely with DEFRA to ensure that the FIR takes account of UK measurement policy including the UK's retention of the pint as a primary indication of measurement for bottled milk and draught beer and cider.

The Food Information Regulation sets out the mandatory particulars that must be included on the packaging of all pre-packaged foods, including the net quantity of the food. It also specifies which units of measurement may be used for that purpose. Therefore, it has been a key objective for the UK to ensure that despite the list of specified units including only metric units, there is a mechanism by which the pint can continue to be used for bottled milk sold in a returnable container. Over the three years of negotiations on this dossier there have been proposals which could have restricted the continued use of the pint for this purpose, for example by specifying that only metric units could be used. However, an amendment was made to the text which allows for the general rule on the manner of the expression of quantity to be disapplied and allows for existing national rules to be retained in certain circumstances. In addition, the FIR includes recognition of more specific community provisions on weights and measures, including those which allow for continued use of the pint. Therefore, the potential threat to the future of the pint has been avoided successfully and the UK retains the right to use the pint for both bottled milk and draught beer and cider.

Lynnette Falk, NMO, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

## Metric Signs: the Battle of Salisbury, continued

BWMA member Rex Poulton is pursuing Salisbury City Council for breach of the 2002 Traffic Regulations and General Directions by installing signs displaying distances in kilometres: to Salisbury, North Carolina 6,276km; Salisbury, Maryland 5,750km; Saintes in France 1,061km; and Xanten in Germany 713km. The Council have refused to change the unlawful signs.

In July, direct action group Active Resistance to Metrication issued the following report:

### A REPORT: A.R.M. IN WILTSHIRE

On Saturday 30 July 2011, an action by A.R.M. in Salisbury, Wiltshire, occurred. In the Guildhall Square in Salisbury, the Town Council had erected an iron fingerpost sign with four double-sided fingerposts pointing to two places in the U.S. (Salisbury in Maryland and North Carolina), one in France, and one in Germany, with the place names and distances in kilometres, lettered in gold, standing proud.

A.R.M. operators first of all painted over the gold numbers with a difficult-to-remove black paint. This is to make restoration by the Council, should they consider restoring the illegal measurements, more time-consuming, and thus more costly (unless, that is, the Mayor of Salisbury is willing to scrape off the black paint and then repaint with gold paint in his own time and at his own expense; it is rather more likely that he will get his fellow taxpayers to foot the bill). The A.R.M. operators then adjourned for refreshment while the paint dried.

Then, eight white plastic panels with black lettering were affixed, using the precise length and width required (A.R.M. having previously carried out a site inspection to assess and measure up the job). The new black-on-white lettering is two inches high and is therefore *much more visible and prominent* than the old, gold lettering. The new distances show the EXACT mileages, as converted from metric to Imperial, by dividing the kilometres by 1.60939. There was one exception, namely the distance to Xantes in Germany, which converts to 443 miles. Unfortunately, the A.R.M. stock of two-inch number '3's had run out, so we had to settle for putting up the distances to Xantes as '444 miles'. Still, what's a mile between friends? A '4' is as good as a '3'.

**Within two weeks, Salisbury City Council had attacked the signs, tore off the imperial distances, and returned the signs to their unlawful, metric status.**

*Rex Poulton, meanwhile, had another go at the District Auditor; here is the Auditor's reply, dated 12 August 2011:*

I refer to your email of 29 July 2011 and to your previous emails of 3 June and 12 July. I apologise for not responding sooner. I am aware that you have

been in correspondence with the previous auditor (Chris Wilson of KPMG) about your concerns. Mr Wilson has forwarded a copy of the correspondence to me.

I can confirm that I concur with the views expressed by Mr Wilson in his email of 5 May 2011 [*see Yardstick 46*] and do not consider that there is any action we need to take as the current auditors of Salisbury City Council in relation to your concerns.

I note that you sent a further email to Mr Wilson on 10 May in which you asked him to consider appropriate financial penalties on those members and officers who authorised the expenditure. I am not aware that you received a response from Mr Wilson to that email, but I can confirm that it would not be possible for an auditor to take the action you have suggested for the following reasons:

1. The expenditure you are concerned about was incurred several years ago. The audit of the accounts for all of the years prior to the year ended 31 March 2011 are closed and external auditors do not have any legal power to consider matters in relation to them, even if they wanted to do so. (i.e. in law the auditors are "functus officio").

2. Even in a situation where the external auditors are in a position to take action, their powers are limited. They are able to apply to a court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law and require that the accounts be restated, but they do not have the legal power to demand restitution from any member or officer. This legal power (commonly known as the right of surcharge) was repealed in 2002.

Thank you for drawing this matter to my attention. I do not propose to enter into further correspondence in relation to it.

Stephen Christopher, Partner Mazars LLP

*TO BE CONTINUED ...*

## **Sierra Leone - U.S. Metric Association admits metrication disguises petrol price rise**

*From Metric Today, July/August 2011:* As part of Sierra Leone's metrication process, that country switched to selling gasoline by the liter on 1 May 2011. Previously, fuel had been sold by the Imperial gallon. But the switch turned out to be more than mere metrication: it was apparently timed to disguise a price increase. Until 1 May 2011, the government had been subsidizing around 5,000-7,000 leones per Imperial gallon (about \$1.16 to \$1.62 per Imperial gallon) with fuel selling for a retail price of 17,500 leones per gallon (\$4.05/gal). On 1 May, the government reduced the

fuel subsidy and switched to selling fuel by the liter, leading to a new price of 5000 leones per liter, equivalent to 22,730 leones per gallon, a 30% price increase (\$1.16/litre or \$5.26/gallon).

## **NEW YORK CITY BLOCKS**

*Vivian Linacre writes:* All city centres in the USA were measured out in chains and rods, mostly on a 'grid-iron' of rectangular blocks. An article about the redevelopment of 'ground zero' (the site of the former Twin Towers) in *The Times* on 13 August prompted me to reply. My letter was published on the 16<sup>th</sup> under the mischievous heading "Pole, rod or perch" – which, of course, are simply different names for the unit which is five-and-a-half yards or one quarter of a chain:

"Sir, Tim Teeman ("All eyes turn to the New York skyline") states that "200ft is the length of a city block". Not so: it is 198ft, because that equals 66 yards or 3 chains or 12 rods, the units by which the whole of North America was surveyed and laid out, within the system of weights and measures that still prevails there and survives unofficially in Britain".

That provoked a reply from a Mr David Dare, published on the 23<sup>rd</sup>: "Sir, I hesitate to disagree with the president of the British Weights and Measures Association, but surely 198ft is far too short a length for a New York City block. My recollection of US cities is that they are laid out in rectangular arrays of ten-acre blocks with sides of length 220 yards (10 chains or 1 furlong). 'Eight blocks to the mile' was how I used to measure distance."

To which I in turn replied on the 26<sup>th</sup>: "David Dare is mistaken. His New York street blocks of 10 chains (1 furlong or 220 yards) did not appear until the city expanded beyond the central core; I was referring to downtown – comprising the grid-iron of a dozen north-south avenues intersected by 155 east-west streets – where the length is indeed 198ft (3 chains or 66 yards) as prescribed by the Commissioners who produced the 1811 plan, consequently forming narrow building lots of no more than 4 acres, which is why developers in Manhattan were obliged to build high."

And there it rests. But for light relief, another letter had been published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> alongside Mr Dare's, from a Mr Richard Wellesley: "The letter on units of measurement reminded me that in the early 1960s, lost in rural Uganda, I asked a farm labourer the way to a certain village. "About a hundred poles up this road", he replied. I went on my way marvelling at the dedication of the Christian missionaries who had spread so widely this essential unit of measurement. It was only on arriving at the village after a longer than expected trip that the penny dropped. He had been referring to the telegraph poles that lined the road."

## **B&Q research**

*Our colleague Stuart Delvin received the following from B&Q, 26 April 2010:* After discussion with our Head Office departments, it is clear that we are required to fulfil all requirements of current legislation regarding the use of Metric and Imperial measures and we are

also keen to supply our customers with information which they find helpful. We know from our research that many customers appreciate the use of Imperial as well as Metric information, and we shall continue to supply this information wherever we can. The current position regarding units of measurement in the UK is clear. The legal requirements permit the use of imperial supplementary indications of quantity when it accompanies the required metric indication. Where there is no legal requirement to indicate a unit of measurement, we are permitted to use imperial measurements and we do this wherever it makes sense to do so. B&Q works closely with trading standards to ensure compliance with all consumer protection legislation.

### **Sainsbury's supermarket**

*Sainsbury's sent the following to Joseph Hand:* Further to our telephone conversation about the imperial measurements in our magazine and on our products. I am sorry that you are disappointed with our decision not to use imperial measurements. I can appreciate your concerns, especially as you were brought up with these rather than the metric measurements. Legally, we have to put the metric unit on the packaging of our goods. However, due to space restrictions we are unable to place the imperial measures on our products as well. I am sorry for any inconvenience that this is causing you.

### **Betterware**

*José O'Ware received the following on 25 August 2011, from the kitchen and bathroom accessories firm, and awaits a further reply:* We are always on the look out for new ideas and we would like to thank you for your recent suggestion [to use imperial measurements]. We have passed your idea on to the correct department for evaluation. Should your suggestion be commercially viable, they will contact you at a later date. Once again we thank you for taking the trouble to contact us - customer feedback is always appreciated.

### ***On Your (imperial) bike, by Warwick Cairns, 9 May 2011***

It's not a big thing. It's a matter of a few inches, to be precise. But Mayor Boris's new hire bikes are now in action all over London; and beside the bag-carrying racks and the unpuncturable tyres, and beside the electronic docking-stations on more or less every street corner, they have one more little feature to make them useful and convenient to those who use them: a scale on the seat-post, to allow you to adjust to the correct height every time you take a bike out. And that scale is in...? Centimetres? Centimetres on one side and inches on the other? Actually, it's in inches, on *both* sides. Which, like the bikes themselves, feels really rather solid and reassuring. Take a look next time you're in the capital.

### **Decimal Watch: from *Hawkesbay Today*, New Zealand, 30 May 2011**

New standardised medication charts being rolled out in all District Health Boards nationwide will reduce the number of adverse events caused by misread drug charts, says Hawke's Bay District Health Board pharmacy manager Billy Allan ... Mr Allan said one of the features, a pre-printed decimal point in the dosage box, could prevent adverse events such as the death of an Auckland woman at North Shore Hospital this month. The woman died after receiving 10 times the prescribed drug dose. Other media reported the mistake may have occurred after a nurse overlooked a decimal point on the patient's medication chart.

### **From the Archives: the introduction to BWMA's annual report of 1907**

In issuing our Third Annual Report we have to record continuous and steady progress throughout the year. Our work generally has been one of investigation and education, with a break in the early months of this year when we were engaged in the task of defending British Weights and Measures against the attacks of Pro-meterists. These attacks culminated in a battle royal in the House of Commons on March 22nd, when the Pro-meterists were handsomely beaten ...

Since that defeat quietness has reigned in the metric camp, but this is only part of the game to lull their opponents into a sense of false security. The best reply we can give to it is to keep our armour bright and our sword keen-edged, and to go on strengthening our army so that when the next battle comes we shall be prepared for it.

We are continuing the policy laid down in our last Annual Report, that of investigating and collecting data to be placed before a Convention representative of English-speaking countries and their dependencies. We conceive it to be our duty to give the facts as to weights and measures usage exactly as we find them. We want to obtain all the evidence, the facts, the truth, that we can find. It is only on such a base that we can secure lasting good. To proceed to lay down the details of any scheme for simplifying and standardising our weights and measures before we had collected all the evidence there is to be had on the subject, would be as unwise on our part as it is for the pro-meterists to set up their metric god in the face of the experience accumulated against it.

## Charles Moore on decimalisation

from *The Spectator*, 19 February 2011

Forty years on this week, and the decimalisation of our coinage still upsets me whenever I think about it. This measure was wrongly conceived from the first. The spur to the change was concern for exports — because some of the Commonwealth was going decimal — a pro-EEC desire to be ‘European’ and a vague sense that a decimal currency was more modern.

But a currency, particularly in its small change, should surely be judged by its acceptance among the people. This subject was carefully avoided. The very existence of the Whitehall working party set up in 1961 to consider how to go decimal was concealed from the public. There was never any widespread popular demand for change, and the argument that people would find a decimal system easier was true in practice only of those who rarely used it, i.e. foreigners. From an educational point of view, our duodecimal system was preferable because it taught children how to count in different bases. People brought up before decimalisation are almost invariably better at mental arithmetic than those born since.

When we lost our shillings and pence, as when, more gradually, our weights and measures were subverted, we lost the full meaning of many of our nursery rhymes, jokes and proverbs. We also lost the actual coins, all of them superior in design to what replaced them and all, because they remained in circulation so long (it was common in the 1960s to receive a Victorian penny in change), of historical interest. We gained nothing worth having.

Indeed, this is literally true, since the inflation of the Heath/Wilson years made the new coins almost valueless. At the time of the change (I was fourteen), I vowed never to utter the new values, but to make an instant conversion every time. Thus my first pint of beer, bought in a pub the following year, cost, I insisted, ‘two and six’ (12.5p). I stuck to this vow until my future wife understandably said that she would have nothing more to do with me unless I changed.

But although I made this sacrifice for love, I still think that the story of decimalisation provides a classic proof of the superiority of conservatism over what Michael Oakeshott called ‘rationalism’. There was no problem with the duodecimal system which our culture could not handle creatively, poetically, comically and efficiently. As with so many things touted at the time as modern, the switch now seems grotesquely out of date, all genuine problems of conversion having been solved by the microchip.

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Read what the media refuses to air

### ***Trial by Conspiracy***

by Jonathan Boyd Hunt

Proof that Neil Hamilton did not take “cash for questions”

Evidence known to the BBC for 15 years, but *never broadcast*

Hardback copies, signed by the author, 335 pages, are available to *Yardstick* readers for the special price of £8, inclusive of P&P. Make cheques/POs payable to Jonathan Boyd Hunt, and post to JB Hunt, c/o BWMA, 98 Eastney Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 3TE

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### **Sainsbury’s supermarket**

The illiteracy of metric Britain continues apace; Sainsbury’s supermarket fresh meat counters display signs saying: “Save 25% per kg”, “Save per 100g”; “½ price per kg”.

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