

The Yardstick

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The Myth of 1965

BWMA has recorded hundreds of half-truths, quarter-truths and outright lies by government ministers, local authorities, corporations and judges. These are designed to justify and perpetuate the compulsory use of metric units. But all frauds start with *one* lie; in the case of metrication, this is the claim that, "We in the United Kingdom first decided to convert to the metric system of weights and measures in 1965" (for example, letters of 5/10/95 and 16/9/10). Vivian Linacre exposes this lie in a pamphlet, *The Myth of 1965*, enclosed with this *Yardstick*.

Traffic Sign Research

As part of its Traffic Signs Policy Review, the Department for Transport commissioned a research project that included testing motorists' understanding of dual and imperial-only height restriction signs (details inside). The report found that, "*There were no differences in understanding between foreign drivers and those with difficulty understanding English, compared to other groups*". This single sentence sinks the oft-cited excuse for metric sign encroachment - that foreign drivers need them. BWMA members who pursue local authorities over unlawful metric signs may wish to note this finding.

New Honorary Member

We are delighted to report that BWMA has a new Honorary Member, writer and philosopher Roger Scruton. Roger specialises in aesthetics, particularly music and architecture, and engages in contemporary political and cultural debates from the standpoint of a conservative thinker. Roger Scruton writes widely in the press, and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a fellow of the British Academy.

Annual General Meeting & Conference

The date and place: Saturday 26 May 2012, to be held at the Victory Services Club, 63 Seymour Street, London W2 2HF, near Marble Arch. We are continuing last year's format: AGM at 2.0pm and conference at 3.0pm. Our Guest Speaker is **Jonathan Boyd Hunt**, author of *Trial by Conspiracy*, referred to on the back page of *Yardstick* 47.

John Gardner, Director

Please note the new address, below

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", 98 Eastney Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 3TE

Red Tape Challenge

Further to correspondence reported in *Yardstick 47*, BWMA received the following reply from the Red Tape Challenge Team, on 21 December 2011:

Dear Mr Gardner,

Please find answers to the specific questions you raise regarding the Ministerial Star Chamber process, below:

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

The Red Tape Challenge is a cross-Whitehall programme, and is led by a small central team across Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Accordingly, Ministerial Star Chambers are attended by the lead Ministers for the Red Tape Challenge - Mark Prisk, the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills); and Oliver Letwin, the Minister of State for Government Policy (Cabinet Office).

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

Once the spotlight has closed on a theme, the lead Department analyses all public proposals – this includes all the website comments, written submissions, and any other relevant evidence (e.g. earlier consultations, or stakeholder meetings). This analysis is then used by Departments to produce a set of initial proposals on regulatory reform. These proposals are then taken through an internal challenge process, including meetings with the Red Tape Challenge team. Departments additionally identify opportunities for external challenge (such as through their sector champion, or stakeholder groups). Once this process is complete, the Departments' reform proposals are put to the Ministerial Star Chamber for review. All the website comments and written submissions are available for Ministers to view throughout the challenge process.

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

A short note is made of actions requested by the Star Chamber and its initial recommendations. Departments must consider these recommendations in preparing their proposals for the Reducing Regulation Committee, and other Cabinet sub-committees. These committees, rather than the Star Chamber, are where Ministers make the decisions on what will change.

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'.

This is not the case. Every regulation published on the Red Tape Challenge website is considered in the rele-

vant thematic Star Chamber. The lead Department for a theme must produce a set of proposals for the Star Chamber that sets out which regulations they propose to keep (and explains why), which they propose to scrap, or which they propose to improve or do differently. The Star Chamber can challenge any of the proposals for a specific regulation, and Departments will be expected to explain their decision.

Kind regards, The Red Tape Challenge Team.

Yardstick readers will know that 'Red Tape Challenge' follows Nick Clegg's 'Your Freedom' last year, and the previous government's 'Better Regulation Portal', which also failed to reduce regulations. Other organisations have come to a similar conclusion as BWMA; according to the Institute of Directors: "The IoD is concerned that the 'Red Tape Challenge' will have as little impact as previous government efforts. The truth is that the Government know where the regulatory 'bodies are buried'. It's not a case of asking businesses for suggestions again and again, it about getting on with the tough decisions that de-regulation requires". A spokesman for the British Retail Consortium said: "Expecting retailers to scrutinise huge lists of old laws imposes a big demand in itself but regulatory reform isn't a numbers game, anyway. It's about reducing the impact. Repealing World War II Trading With The Enemy rules that no one has given a thought to since 1945 may be sensible tidying up but I can't think of one business who'd be helped by it".

* * *

Department for Transport; BWMA letter to Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Norman Baker MP, 7 November 2011

Dear Mr Baker

Our Association campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures. Last year, your predecessor Philip Hammond quashed proposals by the Department for Transport to introduce dual imperial/metric height restriction signs. This move had our support. Yet, the recent traffic signs policy review *Signing the Way* (October 2011) refers in paragraphs 5.21 and 5.22 to the introduction of "New signing to help reduce bridge strikes", and features a dual imperial/metric height restriction sign. Please could you explain how this has come about?

Existing height restriction signs in feet and inches are quite sufficient to convey height restrictions to drivers, and highway authorities already have the option of adding a metric sign alongside, should they feel the need. This proposed new sign is an example of "creeping metrication", and is not consistent with the stated position of successive ministers *not* to metricate road signs.

Yours sincerely, etc

Reply from the Department for Transport, 15 December 2011:

Thank you for your letter dated 7 November about the proposed new sign to warn road users of a height restriction shown in Imperial and metric measurements as described in the Department's "Signing the Way". I have been asked to reply.

As you are aware, the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002 already prescribe two signs for this purpose in diagram 530, one giving an Imperial measurement and the other metric. The Department will introduce a new sign in its forthcoming amendment regulations to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002. The new diagram 530A will include both measurements; it is a neater assembly and will reduce costs and sign clutter. There is no requirement for authorities to use it, the separate metric and imperial signs will still be prescribed and authorities will be free to place the imperial only sign.

I can confirm there is no change to the Government's policy on the use of metric measurement on traffic signs and there are no plans to review it. I hope that this clarifies the situation.

Judith Tracey, Regulatory Services and Information

Department for Transport Research Project

As part of its Traffic Signs Policy Review, the Department for Transport commissioned a Research Project, prepared by AECOM Limited, into the *Awareness of the Meaning of Traffic Signs*,¹ released May 2011. 820 people were interviewed and shown 38 signs, including a diagram of a dual imperial-metric circular height restriction sign, indicating "4.4m / 14ft 6in". Respondents were asked: can a vehicle 12 feet high drive past this sign? 95% answered correctly. They were also asked: can a vehicle 4.5m high drive past this sign? 97% answered correctly. The report stated, "Almost all respondents gave the correct response to each question, showing that the sign was well understood and observed. There were no differences in understanding between foreign drivers and those with difficulty understanding English, compared to other groups".

The survey also included a picture of an imperial-only width restriction sign, indicating 6'6". The report stated, "Almost all respondents [96%] understood the height restriction shown on the sign and felt it was easy to understand ... there were no differences in understanding between foreign drivers and those who had difficulty understanding English, compared to other groups".

* * *

¹ <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/signing-the-way/understanding-of-traffic-signs.pdf>

A Tale of Two Bottles

BWMA wrote to Gaymers Cider, Dublin, on 1 December 2011: Our Association campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, and is delighted that Gaymers Cider is produced in one pint bottles. However, the bottles are not labelled as one pint, but "568ml". We would like to ask why Gaymers does not declare the "1 pint" quantity on its bottles, alongside the metric indication. This is legal in the EU as a "supplementary indication", and would be popular among consumers here in the UK, and quite possibly in Ireland, too. Would you not consider this change?

Gaymers' reply, 9 December 2011: Thank you for your letter which has been passed on to me by our head of marketing. I look after all the marketing for the Gaymers brand and therefore I am responsible for looking at what we declare in terms of weights and measures. I am currently in the process of assessing the packaging for the brand as a whole and as such we are conducting some in depth consumer research. As part of this we will be considering the size of the bottle and what we declare on it so we will be looking at the popularity of the 568ml bottle and the use of the pint claim so your letter is very timely and is something we are currently considering.

Victoria Walker, Innovation Lead, Magners GB

BWMA to Wells Bombardier bitter, 1 December 2011: A few years ago, Wells Bombardier was sold in one pint bottles; indeed, this was a selling point. Now, however, Wells Bombardier is sold in metric bottles of 500ml. Why did Wells & Young's make this change? We hope that Wells & Young's will consider reintroducing the pint bottle, as its standard product.

Bombardier's reply, 21 December 2011: Thank you for your letter dated 1st December 2011, asking why we changed from selling Bombardier in pint bottles to 500ml size. The pint bottle was being disadvantaged due to two key developments:

- 1) Respective Governments' continually putting duty up on beer which penalised larger sized bottles
- 2) Supermarkets' desire to sell beer as cheaply as possible to retain market share

I would very much prefer to see our Bombardier back in pint bottles. However, until the Government and Supermarkets change their own approach to beer highlighted above we have no alternative but to keep producing in the 500ml size. I hope this answers your query raised.

Nigel D McNally, Managing Director, Wells and Young's Brewing Company Ltd

Metric Milk

The following report was received from Jess Cully, Portsmouth, 2 November 2011: One of my local

newsagents sells milk, and has a sign on her fridge reading "Milk - 1 pint 55p, 2 pints 99p, 4 pints £1.80". The pint bottles are indeed pint bottles, but the "2 pint" and "4 pint" bottles are really 1 litre and 2 litre, respectively. When I drew this to her attention, it was clear she'd never thought about the difference.

Metric fingerpost signs: the Battle of Salisbury, continued

BWMA member Rex Poulton is pursuing Salisbury City and Wiltshire Councils for 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.

On **13 September 2011**, Rex received the following email from Mark Boden, Corporate Director of Wiltshire Council, claiming the council's authority for the signs was section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890:

Dear Mr. Poulton,

I refer to previous correspondence concerning signs in Salisbury Market Place. I apologise for not having giving a substantive reply sooner but I thought it best to have the council's officers including the council's solicitor investigate the matter and advise me.

I understand that the signs concerned were erected in 2008 to commemorate the links of the city of Salisbury with its twin towns. I am advised that, under section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890, Salisbury District Council was entitled to erect the signs as a monument. Please note that Wiltshire Council is empowered under the same legislation to maintain the signs.

... section 42 is still in force and has not been repealed by any subsequent legislation. It makes no specific provision as to the form of any such monument, including any wording or numbering on it. Accordingly the signs can lawfully remain in Salisbury Market Place and in their original form. Please note that I cannot therefore share your view that the Council, its members or officers have committed a crime or otherwise acted inappropriately in this matter.

Yours sincerely, etc

Editor's note: *this was the first time in twelve months of correspondence that the Public Health Amendment Act 1890 had been identified; its wording is as follows:*

Statues and monuments. Any urban authority may from time to time authorise the erection in any street or public place within their district of any statue or monument, and may maintain the same, and any statue or monument erected within their district before the adoption of this part of this Act, and may

remove any statue or monument the erection of which has been authorised by them.

On 26 September 2011, Rex receives an email from Wiltshire Council's Barrister and Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Frank Cain:

Dear Mr Poulton

... I have carefully considered the various correspondence you have forwarded to different Officers within Council and their replies. I have also considered the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002. I have also considered the House of Lords decision of *DPP v Jones [1999] 2 AC 240, [1999] 2 All ER 257* that you have referred to.

I am satisfied that Wiltshire Council has not acted unlawfully in erecting the signs that you have complained about. I am satisfied that the signs are not traffic signs as anticipated by the legislation. The signs were erected to commemorate the twinned cities visit. They do not convey relevant information to the traffic on the road. The signs identify cities hundreds of miles from the location and while they point in the general direction of the cities they are not directional signs upon which the passing public would rely. They are distinguishable from road signs which confirm to traffic that they are on the right road to a city in the distance. Therefore the traffic on the road, be it pedestrian, cyclist or motorist, would not be relying on the signs to direct them. The signs merely convey novelty information and anybody viewing the signs would be easily able to identify the signs as such. Therefore the signs do not have to comply with the requirements of the Regulations. I am of the opinion that if the signs were set out as traffic signs it could in fact be distracting to traffic on the road as such traffic would be looking to the signs to impart traffic information, when in fact they would be merely conveying novelty information to commemorate the visit.

It would appear that your main objection in regard to these signs is that they suggest evidence of the metrification of the United Kingdom. This is not the case. The use of kilometres in these signs was merely an acknowledgement of the measurement used in the twinned cities. I point out that the metrification of the United Kingdom is a political question that the council has no control over. The Council in its traffic signs does follow the imperial system and will do while that is the legislative will.

I would also point out that in May 2011 Council officers indicated that in any review of these signs could also involve consideration of whether the signs should stay metric. That correspondence clearly set out that any such offer was not made because of any perceived illegality but merely because you had raised an objection to metrification and therefore during the review this issue would be considered.

I note that there has been considerable correspondence on this point over the past 12 months. I consider that Wiltshire Council has fully answered your query. As I am sure you will understand Council has an obligation to its ratepayers to ensure that it does not unnecessarily incur public expenditure and therefore it does not propose to enter into further correspondence in respect of this matter except if you identify a new issue that has not previously been raised that needs consideration.

I hope that this assists you to understand Council's position in regard to these signs.

Rex replied to Mr Cain on 18 October 2011:

Dear Mr Cain

If I understand your position correctly, you are saying that the imperial requirement of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 does not apply because the signs do not convey information relevant to persons in their capacity as "traffic", be they motorist, pedestrian or cyclist; and that, as such, they are not traffic signs.

This would also mean that the Council has no authority under TSRGD 2002 to install the signs. Paul Shaddock says in his email of 13 September 2011 that section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890 provides the authority to install the signs as a monument.

I have read section 42 and it refers to "*monuments and statues*". I have tried to imagine the surprise of nineteenth-century legislators had they known that section 42, written perhaps for Gordon of Khartoum and the first Boer War, would one day be used to justify metric signs.

The difficulty with Mr Shaddock's explanation is that until he assumed this legal authority, he repeatedly referred to the construction in question as a *sign*. For example, his email of 17 May 2011 refers to "*sign*" and "*pedestrian fingerpost sign*". Mr Shaddock is particularly clear that the construction is a sign in this sentence, "*I will ask the Project Manager for the Salisbury Vision Project to consider amending the sign to remove the metric measurements as part of a future project to improve pedestrian fingerpost signage throughout the city centre*".

You will note that Mr Shaddock does not refer to the construction as a monument. Nor does any other official in the twelve months of this correspondence, be that Reg Williams, Mrs Scott or Mark Boden. In your email, you also refer to "*signs*". Indeed, your argument is not that they are not signs, merely that they are not *traffic* signs. You explain that they are signs which convey "*novelty information*". As such, they cannot therefore be a monument.

Since no-one at Salisbury City Council or Wiltshire Council Highways Maintenance Department considers the signs to be a monument, will you please identify the legal instrument under which these signs were erected?

16 November 2011: reply from Frank Cain

Dear Mr Poulton

With all due respect signs can be monuments. The Online Oxford Dictionary defines a "monument" as including: a statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a notable person or event:

In the present case I point out:

- The signs are a structure.
- The signs were erected to commemorate the visit of the twin cities. You acknowledge this yourself in your email of 11 April 2011. The commemoration of the links between Salisbury with its twin towns is a notable event.
- The novelty value is a reflection of this event as it identifies the twinned towns and their distance from Salisbury.

Therefore the Council was legally entitled to erect the signs under section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890. I would refer you to Mr Boden's letter of 31 August 2010 and his email of 13 September 2011.

This is the third time that this issue has been addressed. I reiterate Council has an obligation to its ratepayers to ensure that it does not unnecessarily incur public expenditure and therefore it does not propose to enter into further correspondence in respect of this matter, except if you identify a new issue that has not previously been raised that needs consideration. I hope this helps you to understand the legal position.

Rex replied to Mr Cain on 11 December 2011

Dear Mr Cain

To continue our monumental correspondence, I have re-inspected the signs to see whether there is a plaque, plate or commemorative inscription that supports your contention that these signs are a monument. There is no such plaque or inscription; nor is there a date. Thus, the signs do not state what they commemorate, or when. The only information provided is locations, distances and directions.

You will recall that Paul Shaddock, in his emails of 17 May 2011 and 12 July 2011, referred to the sign as part of the city's "*signage*"; and Jane Scott, Leader of the Council, in her email of 14 June 2011, described the sign in relation to a "*project to improve the pedestrian fingerpost signage*". Jane Scott also explained that she had liaised with Mr Shaddock about the issue and had been "*made aware of its history*", in which case both would have known whether the sign had been erected as a monument. Neither of them - had it been so - would have spoken subsequently in terms of "*signage*". Indeed, I am certain they'd both have made the point very clearly to me that it was in fact a *monument* in which case I am sure they'd have mentioned to me the Public Health Amendment Act under which it will have been

erected. It is noteworthy that neither wrote me in those terms.

Moreover, they would not have made an offer to consider *amending* the sign, if it had been a *monument*.

You explain that the use of kilometres on the sign was an "acknowledgement of the measurement used in the twinned cities". Yet, this cannot be true, either, as neither North Carolina nor Maryland use kilometres.

It does seem that Wiltshire Council is defining the sign as a monument *retrospectively*, thereby importing section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890 as a substitute for the Traffic Sign Regulations and General Directions 2002.

Fortunately, I can see a way of this resolving this issue, thereby saving further public expense. Wiltshire Council need only produce documentation such as the planning application and other written approval or agreement etc, dated from the time of the signs' installation in 2008 that identifies section 42 of the Public Health Amendment Act 1890 as the relevant legal authority. I look forward to receiving this information.

Frank Cain did not respond to Rex's request for documentation and so Rex sent a reminder on 13 January 2012. Still no response was forthcoming, so Rex sent a further email on 20 February 2012:

Dear Mr Cain

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

You have twice now failed to respond to my request for documentation ... As Head of Legal Services, you will be aware that requests for documentation from the public are covered by the Freedom of Information Act and that as such, Wiltshire Council in not replying, is acting unlawfully. Please therefore now send me copies of the following documentation, dating from the time of erection of the Salisbury market place twinning signs (believed to be 2008) and which identifies the relevant legal authority under which these signs were erected.

1. The planning application and notice of proposal
2. Committee decisions
3. Officers' reports
4. Correspondence, including email, relating to the fingerposts (prior to their erection)
5. Quotations for the work, invoices, instructions to the supplier.

... I would like this information to be provided to me as paper copies, please. I understand that you are required to respond to my request within 20 working days after you receive this letter.

Yours sincerely, etc

TO BE CONTINUED ...

From the Archives: a letter from a school manager, enclosing a Note that he had received, featured in BWMA's annual report, July 1905

[Editor's note: we are unclear as to the purpose of the asterisks in the below text, but have included them in case their meaning can be decoded by a Yardstick reader]:

Sirs,

ARE YOU A METRONITE? ARE you? I am not quite sure what a metronite means, so cannot say whether I am one myself. I hope I am, if it is anything that a good school manager ought to be. I presume I am, and an inactive one, for I got the following by post the other day:—

TO INERT METRONITES

NOTES

The metric system is now permissive in Britain.

Among adherents (I.E. subscribers, donators and honorary members) of the British Decimal Association there are many manufacturers &c who *could* * adopt the system within their own sphere. Some have done so — but how many hesitate and put off doing so until Parliament has *fixed a date* for general and obligatory adoption. This can hardly be done until Britain is more **familiar** with the metric system.

But how can this "familiarisation" be brought about if influential adherents who alone can further the movement * remain *inert???*

Each such * adherent might, by *adopting* the system, become a centre radiating the knowledge of the same and consequently increasing its popularity for luckily in this matter "much familiarity breeds" respect!!

To all such timid adherents, I address these "Notes" with a special request to mark and inwardly digest the following words.

You wait inertly for the fixing of a "date" which **your own passivity keeps distant**.

K. MORVEN

I am quite in favour of a metric system, but I am not prepared to live and die for it exactly. There is a good deal to be said on the other side. A decimal notation is not everything. One of our greatest philosophers was dead against it. I mean, *is* dead against it, because he is now actually dead, and when I said that he *was* dead it might suggest that he is not dead now. I wish he wasn't — I

mean, I wish he isn't — no, I mean — But the gentle reader will understand what I mean; this kind of thing makes me wish for a metric system of grammar. In a metric system you shift the decimal point, I believe, so that the point in metrical system cannot be accused of inertness. Abroad, I have had difficulties with the metric system, however. I am never sure whether to ask for a kilogramme of cognac or a hectolitre of bread. Upon the whole, I fear I *am* an inert metronite, so that “K. Morven” hit the mark when he posted his circular to me.

SCHOOL MANAGER

Korean TV speaks to BWMA

Warwick Cairns writes: A while ago I received a call from a man by the name of Jae Won Kim of South Korea's MBC TV, asking whether I'd like to be interviewed about the continuing fondness of the British for Imperial measures. I agreed and the date was fixed. And then on the day it was due, Mr Kim rang to cancel. He was terribly sorry, he said, but there had been an important news story in Libya, and he had to get onto a plane there immediately. It was to do with Colonel Gaddafi; he'd been captured and killed.

Several months passed and I forgot all about it. Then, in January this year Mr Kim phoned again. Would I still be willing to do the interview? People back in Korea were very interested in the subject, he said. I agreed – and in the meantime I did some research, to find out what possible relevance the activities of BWMA could have to the inhabitants of a country half a world away. Rather a lot, as it turns out. Like the Japanese, the Koreans have their own system of traditional measures, originally based on the classical Chinese system. They have some measures they find particularly useful, like the *pyeong*: imagine a man lying on the ground with his arms and legs spread out – that area is a *pyeong*, more or less. It's a very natural, intuitive way of visualising floorspace: so when an estate agent describes a flat as having a floorspace 1½ *pyeongs*, or 100 *pyeongs*, you have a pretty good idea of what to expect. The Japanese have a similar measure, the *tsubo*, based on the dimensions of a *tatami* mat.

Now in 2000, tidy-minded officials in the Korean government, like tidy-minded officials elsewhere, decided that what Korea really needed was to do away with all this old-fashioned traditional stuff, all the *pyeongs* and *jas* (a *ja* is the Korean 'foot', equal to 11.8 inches in our measures) and go metric instead. The Koreans took not a blind bit of notice. So, in 2007 the officials came back for a second go; but now they started imposing fines for non-compliance. It has caused no end of conflict there, and no end of ill-feeling between 'traditional' Koreans and the 'modern' international-minded set. And hence what we do here, and what we think here, is of very great relevance to Korea indeed.

So, Mr Kim asked, would I say that continuing to use Imperial measures has been a barrier to international trade? I would not. In fact, I would go so far as to say that our understanding of and sympathy for the 'foot-pound

system' is of positive advantage to us when it comes to international trade with the world's largest and most advanced economy, the USA. Which is of course a non-metric country. And, I added, we're happy enough to be bilingual in metric when it comes to dealing with nations that use the metric system. There's no reason, I said, to trample over people's cultures and impose one global system on everyone: it works with languages, after all. Korea trades with Japan, but no-one is seriously suggesting that Koreans be forced to speak Japanese, are they? Which was just as well, Mr Kim said, because if they did, a lot of Koreans would be very unhappy, indeed.

Warwick's subtitled interview is expected run in Korea some time in March or April 2012.

Architect Michael Walton writes, 8 November 2011: Sirs, In the continuing saga of imperial v metric measures, I thought members might enjoy the following from Richard Hardman, former President of the Geological Society. I also like to think a 'barrel of oil' is a good example of a fine customary measure;

“The cradle of large scale oil drilling was in America where Colonel Drake is credited with the first modern well drilled in 1858 at Titusville, Pennsylvania, using equipment designed for salt drilling but adding the important step of encasing the hole with a metal pipe to prevent collapse: oil was found at a depth of 70ft. From this small beginning a mighty industry was spawned and naturally imperial measures were used to report the well depths and to order drill bits and the steel casings; they were also used for well completions when tubing and pump jacks were run in the hole. Today, despite strong attempts at metrification, the upstream oil exploration industry finds it hard to think in metres for drill bit sizes, casing and tubing - the industry is too set in its ways of manufacture to change to metric”.

***Decimal Watch:* msnbc.com reports Seattle nurse's suicide over fatal decimal error, 27 June 2011**

For registered nurse Kimberly Hiatt, the horror began last Sept. 14, the moment she realized she'd overdosed a fragile baby with 10 times too much medication ... In Hiatt's 24-year career, all of it at Seattle Children's, dispensing 1.4 grams of calcium chloride — instead of the correct dose of 140 milligrams — was the only serious medical mistake she'd ever made, public investigation records show ... That mistake turned out to be the beginning of an unraveled life, contributing not only to the death of the child, 8-month-old Kaia Zautner, but also to Hiatt's firing, a state nursing commission investigation — and Hiatt's suicide on April 3 at age 50. Hiatt's dismissal — and her death — raise larger questions about the impact of errors on providers, the so-called “second victims” of medical mistakes ... the first victim is the patient, the person hurt or killed by a preventable error — but the second victim is the person who has to live with the aftermath of making it ... Hiatt was escorted from the hospital after the mistake, immediately put on administrative leave and then fired within weeks.

Weights and Measures in New Zealand

by Bruce Moon

As it is over forty years since the Metric System was adopted officially in New Zealand, it is interesting to note the ways in which use of foot-pound weights and measures has persisted.

Introduction of metrics was quite ruthless, particularly in schools, while alternatives such as expressing the temperature in Fahrenheit degrees as well as Celsius did not occur. The familiar one-foot school rulers remained but references on them to anything but centimetres and millimetres disappeared. Teachers, who are not in general *users* of weights and measures, tend to be metric enthusiasts so the foot-pound-second system is excluded from formal education and some of the rising generation are woefully ignorant about it. For instance, when I asked for a “9 by 4” envelope a young shop assistant did not understand me; when I explained, she said she knew nothing about inches.

I fare better when I order timber from the wood-yard, in sizes like “4 by 2” and “6 by 1”. Indeed, when I gave my order verbally in such terms to the yard-man he actually wrote himself a note my way, to assist in selecting what I wanted. Carpenters do seem to have accepted millimetres for use in construction work though I cannot say whether they approximate to the nearest two or five which may be the case.

I notice that in photographic shops, enlargement sizes like “5 by 7” and “6 by 8” are clearly preferred (these being dimensions in inches of course). Many cooks continue to prefer pounds and ounces and dressmakers to use inches.

Perhaps the most persistent retention of foot-pound units is in reference to human-body measurements, where their natural superiority applies. In birth notices in the newspapers, the weight of the new arrival is nearly always stated in pounds and ounces. Grams just seem so wholly inappropriate. Personal heights too, only seem to have meaning in feet and inches. A growing young man may be asked whether he is six feet tall yet, to which he might reply “No, an inch still to go”. In weight-loss programs, people tend mostly to talk about the number of pounds they have lost (perhaps it sounds better that way as the number is bigger!). Beer glasses are mostly referred to by their British sizes (as George Orwell would have been relieved to note). One may order an “eight” or a “twelve” (fluid ounces) or a “half” or a “pint” in most bars.

An irritating practice is that when the newspapers receive a report which refers say to feet and inches, they do some mindless wordsmithing to convert to newspeak, often producing a quite absurd result. I was moved recently to write about this to the local newspaper, under the heading, “False Reporting”:

Dear Sir, You report Dr Kevin Trenberth as saying (with respect to the strength of hurricanes): “...if about 305 millimetres of rain falls in New Orleans that means about an extra 25.4mm of rainfall more than might have occurred anyway.” No scientist would use figures that way. What he did say will have been “... if about one foot (twelve inches) of rain falls in New Orleans that means about an extra one inch of rainfall, etc.” Today, when one may say anything one likes about the Virgin or the Prophet, you must think that it is the new blasphemy to dare to talk in feet and inches.
Yours faithfully, etc

In ordinary speech, foot-pound units remain in general use. In the last few days I have noted “inch by inch”, “still miles away”, “five-foot high waves”, “a ten-acre block” (of land) and it would be no trouble to collect more. We continue to use feet for the altitudes of aircraft as is international practice.

Yes, now the metric system is dominant and pervasive in New Zealand but foot-pound units persist in many places where officialdom has not eliminated them. Concurrently, the great improvement in arithmetic skills metrics were claimed to bring has turned out to be the chimera we knew it would be. Many younger people nowadays know no more arithmetic than what is required to push the buttons on a calculator and use one for the most elementary sums. Well do I remember the days when the greengrocer, using dozens arithmetic, would do all the calculations he needed in his head and give one the grand total as he handed over the last item purchased. As McLuhan or someone once said, indeed, “better” means “worse”!

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