

# FULCRUM

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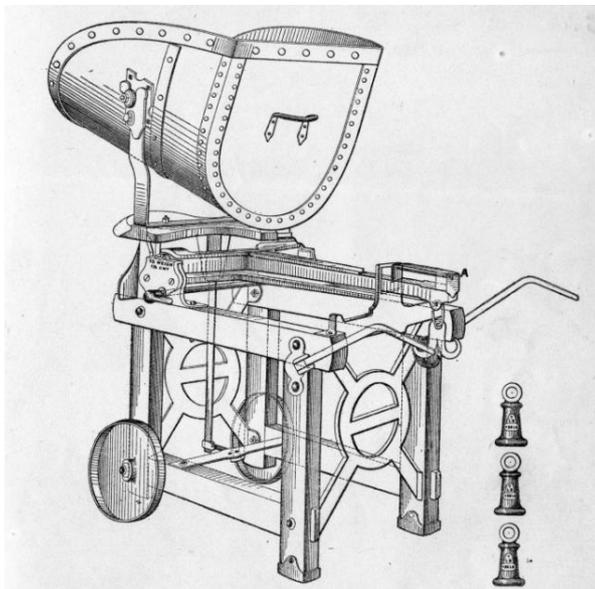
## Memories of Jack

Back in Edition 36 I mentioned that one of my friends has taken to sending me photographs of scales that he encounters when he is out and about. The practice is clearing contagious as another ambulatory acquaintance has also taken to doing the same thing as he drags his mobile home across the land.

Whilst he was stopping near the Nene Valley railway, apparently in a coal yard, he encountered the scale shown right.

The scoop scale was the alternative option for the British coal merchant who wanted something a bit more 'user friendly' than the deadweight or 'bob-up' type of machine.

This type of net weighing device dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when simple scoop scales appeared



which were either lever types with proportional poises (left) or equal armed 'even balance' devices. The lever machine was eventually improved by the addition of a self indicating headwork.

The Avery version of this scale was known as the 3708BFN model with a chart that indicated +7lbs.

This gave the opportunity for more speedy and accurate weighing.

It was a great idea but, given that the self indicating mechanism was a comparatively delicate flower with steel ribands and springs, it proved a little fragile.

The fragility was made manifest by the general lack of care that the average coal merchant bestowed on his weighing machines which were banged around incessantly and left outside, whatever the weather. The inclusion of a glass viewing window was nothing less than madness.

These machines were encountered mainly in the yards of the larger coal companies and were usually supplemented by a few of the more robust deadweights for 'back-up' use when the inevitable destruction occurred.

When I was doing some inspections for a Local Authority a few years ago, I went to a large coal yard that hadn't been visited for many years. I found a very traditional set up with deadweight scales and 25kg iron weights. The scales just about complied with the unofficial coalman tolerances but the weights were well worn as might be expected.

These were subsequently adjusted and re-verified.

In one corner of the yard there were two Avery 3708BFN scoop scales which looked in a rather sorry state. Like the MacArthur Park cake they had been left out in the rain and, consequently all the sweet green icing was not doing so well. A cursory test of both machines revealed serious problems of operation. A quick peek behind the back panels however showed that the mechanisms were still largely intact but in need of expert attention.

The coalman said he would like to get them repaired but the local scalemakers were not interested in, or able to service anything that didn't have flashing lights on it.

I had a thought and said I might be able to help. I then rang our good friend Jack White and explained the situation. Jack was quite enthusiastic but pointed out he could only carry out a limited amount of work on the machines without incurring the need for full re-verification (in all the excitement I had completely 'forgotten' to obliterate the verification stamps). He would be unable to fit any new parts and he didn't have any accurate calibration weights. I pointed out that that the yard's weights were newly adjusted and should serve the purpose and I felt that adjustment only was required. In the event he did go to the yard and was able to work his magic on both scales and get them back into working order.

The merchant was very pleased to get his scales in working again and I think Jack really enjoyed being able to rescue them from the scrap yard.

I subsequently found that the 3708BFN scoop scale can still be bought from one or two suppliers in the UK.

These will be second hand refurbished items and still



cost about £500 plus VAT. It makes you wonder why they are left out in the rain!

Whilst researching scoop scales I came across the one shown above. There was no explanation about the machine but examination of the picture suggests a machine from Continental Europe rather than the UK. It is clearly a decimal scale of the design invented by Alois Quintenz. Continental coalmen must have a much lighter touch than their UK counterparts.

### A Cry for Help

From time to time I bang on about scales that appear on television antique programmes



with the loose poises and even the loose poise carrier being long gone. The annoying thing is that in all the subsequent dealings nobody involved appears to have any idea that these essential components have gone walkabout. In any other field of collecting these people drone on about original condition, but are quite happy to buy and sell a scale that is incomplete and totally useless.

One person who is aware of the need for a full set of poises is a gentleman who now lives in Italy and is the proud possessor of a 24 stone Avery personal weigher. He has owned this scale for many years and refurbished it himself back in the 1980s.

As a British scale, designed to weigh people, it is graduated in stones, a unit that is still used to

describe body weight in the UK, even by younger people, who are otherwise thoroughly metricated. The poises for the machine are 2 x 8 stone, 1 x 4 stone, 1 x 2 stone, 1 x 1 stone and 1 x ½ stone. The other ½ stone is on the steelyard and subdivided into 1 x ounce divisions.

Horror of horrors, during the move to Italy the 4 stone poise was lost (upper set). As is seen in the photograph below he currently uses a length of chain, in lieu of the poise, but eventually he decided to seek a replacement. This however proved difficult and in desperation he sought help from ISASC, via the US website. As usual, the request ended up with me and I was all set to put out an appeal in this edition of Fulcrum.

I decided however to have a bit of a rummage around in the various boxes of miscellaneous ironmongery that I have managed to acquire over the years. Lo and behold I came across a set of poises which looked suspiciously like the stricken set languishing in Tuscany (lower set). I wasn't quite sure whether they would be the same size as the others but I figured that the standard platform ratio of 112 : 1 would apply.

This turned out to be the case and apart from the absence of the second 8 stone poise they appeared to match perfectly so I estimated that one good set could probably be achieved from the two. After a certain amount of correspondence and an offer of a contribution to charity the poises were put in a plastic ice cream carton and were soon heading for an address in the City of London whence (apparently) they will find their way to Italy.

I was a little concerned that the arrival of a plastic box full of, what civilians could see as, suspicious lumps of iron, would be greeted with panic and entail the arrival of the bomb squad.

In the event they arrived at their City address unexploded and are destined to go on to their final destination in February.

It's quite pleasing to have contributed to the saving of a nice old scale and I'm sure we all wish it well as a little piece of Imperialism among the kilograms.



The current 'chain' poise soon to be replaced

## Going Dutch

As well as requests for bits of scales we continue to receive queries from people seeking information about their machines. Such was the case when the owner of a Dutch Windmill from near Arnhem in the east of the country, asked for some information about the scale he recently acquired for use in his mill. I was surprised when I saw the pictures as they were of an Avery low pattern deadweight, a scale I had regarded as typically British and little used in continental Europe. He had however obtained it from another Dutch mill owner so perhaps I was wrong.



**I was able to tell him that the pattern dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and it continued to be used for many years. I recall them in wide use on the quayside of Grimsby fish docks throughout the 1970s and 1980s where they suffered horrendous abuse. They were however so robust that they could be readily repaired back to full working order.**



The design never changed and the scale continued to be produced well into comparatively modern times.

The scale is apparently a big hit at the mill, which is a working site, open to the public. Children love to weigh themselves on the machine as do some of their parents. The miller really likes his scale and was fascinated by the little bits of its history that I was able to furnish.

It's really nice to know that a little piece of British metrological history is regularly clanking up and down in a 500 year old windmill (above) in the Netherlands.

### Truffling About

In the last edition I mentioned the Alba or White truffle. These are hewn, by pixie miners, from the stygian depths of Bolognese fungus pits and sent over to Britain. Here, foodies buy them at stupid prices (I may have got some of the technical details wrong but the stupid prices bit is correct).

We were recently in London, staying near London Bridge so we wandered over to the nearby Borough Market for that ultimate middle class experience.

It's easy to get carried away in a location like that where you are surrounded by acres (or hectares) of glorious looking food. We were so enchanted that we were seduced into buying some craft cheeses, carefully curated in the verdant pastures of lower Loamshire or somewhere which were priced accordingly. We saved them for Christmas and they turned out to be entirely foul. Such is life!

Whilst we had clearly lost all common sense we were not so far gone as to mess with the luxury fungus. We came across a stall selling exotic truffles as shown in the pictures above. The black truffle was price at £ 435 per 100 grams and the alba was being knocked out at £510 per hectogram. Admittedly £5000 per kilo is not quite as much as the retail price of saffron or printer ink but it still seems a lot to pay for something to scrape over an omelette.

**It wasn't even being weighed out on a Herbert Lion Scale!**

