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Fulcrum is a newsletter for collectors of antique weighing and measuring equipment and enthusiasts of historic metrology. It is published in February, May, August and November. Contributions should be sent to the Editor, John Knights.

The Good Old days

There was a time when going to the shops was sometimes a little more risky than it should have been. Trading malpractice was widespread and many a perfectly innocent purchase could end up with a less than satisfactory outcome.

Food adulteration was widespread, usually involving the substitution of cheap fillers for expensive food ingredients such as flour, sugar or milk. The adulterants were normally non-comestible but largely anodyne substances but occasionally things went horribly wrong and the consequences were more than mere disappointment.

One such occurrence was the so called 'Bradford Sweets Poisoning of 1858'!

A sweet seller called William Hardaker (a seller of confectionary rather than an amiable retailer) ran a stall on the market in Bradford, a large industrial town in the north of England. He bought his sweets from a business owned by Joseph Neal who manufactured various types of sugar confectionary. As a benevolent and far seeing confectioner, Joseph did not wish to think that the recipients of his sweetmeats were over indulging in unhealthy sucrose. He therefore routinely substituted a portion of the sweet stuff with more wholesome gypsum. Gypsum is a calcium compound more often used to plaster walls but it apparently, proved to be a convincing substitute for sugar. By a happy coincidence gypsum only cost one thirteenth as much as sugar. He obtained his competitively priced gypsum from a pharmacy owned by a man called Hodgson who had a large barrel of the stuff in his store room. It was clearly sold as a known adulterant and even had the 'trade' name 'daff', so all parties seemed to know what was going on in this world of twisted commerce. Unfortunately, in addition to a barrel of gypsum, Mr Hodgson also had a barrel of arsenic trioxide in the same storeroom (that's a barrel of arsenic in the same storeroom. What could possibly go wrong?) Inevitably one day, following a bit of Laurel and Hardy type nonsense in the said store room, Mr

Neal ended up with 12lbs of arsenic rather than his usual bag of Plaster of Paris. The sweet maker's chief adulterator, who was clearly an experienced professional, did actually notice that the 'daff' looked a bit different on this occasion. After a cursory sniff and a moment's deliberation however, he tipped it into a batch of humbugs anyway.

Enter William Hardaker, known at this time as 'Humbug Billy' (his soubriquet after the event is not recorded) who purchased some of the humbugs as usual, which he then proceeded to sell on his market stall.

21 people died of arsenic poisoning and over 200 Bradfordians became seriously ill.

Criminal proceedings were initiated but oddly no one was ever actually convicted of anything. The whole thing was, apparently considered to be a Lemony Snicket-like series of unfortunate events rather than the insane criminally recklessness that would be alleged today. On the plus side it did merit a cartoon in Punch (right).



THE GREAT LOZENGEMAKER.
A Hint to Paternosters.

Whilst the mass killing of poor Northerners clearly didn't engender great concern at this time, other frauds, designed to separate respectable Metropolitan Victorians from their material wealth, were regarded more seriously.

I recently came across a copy of a 19th century publication called 'Penny Pictorial Magazine' which in 1899 featured an article called 'The Scales of Injustice' which dealt with methods employed by traders in London, to cheat buyers.

These days, frauds tend to be conducted on a grand scale and are designed to steal bank accounts or pensions. In the 19th century however much effort and ingenuity was exerted to cheat purchasers, making mundane daily purchases, out of comparatively nugatory amounts of money.

The items featured in the article had been seized by inspectors of the London County Council and were kept in their Black Museum. It is apparent that a great deal of engineering acumen went into the manufacture or modification of items of weighing and measuring equipment in order to render their use of considerable advantage to the seller.

The iron weights shown on the front page have been assiduously hollowed out so that the 56lb coal weight weighed only 25lbs and the pound weight only 9 ounces. I find it hard to believe that buyers would not have actually noticed that some 50% of their purchase was absent but the sellers appeared to get away with it until the Inspector

called. The pair of 'cheating scales' is an interesting example as it demonstrates that someone was seriously messing with the enigmatic Roberval parallelogram. Apparently one pound in eight could be illegally gained, simply by moving the load to the back of the goods plate. This is suggestive of a bit of serious leg shortening but unfortunately the technical niceties of the illicit engineering are not revealed.

THE SCALES OF INJUSTICE

HOW WE ARE SWINDLED

By H. J. Holmes.

BY FALSE WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

Photos by Carl Opt.



FEW people have any conception of the enormous amount of roguery practised by many London shopkeepers, and especially by those who cater for the lower middle classes and the very poor.



In one district alone it is significant that a list of suspected, caught, and convicted offenders against the laws of fraudulent weights and measures runs into thousands, for a period of less than four years! Their victims number hundreds of thousands of customers who, through ignorance, blind faith, or carelessness, allow the disgraceful system to go on unchecked until the London County Council officials pounce upon the rogues, who meet their deserts in most cases with unblushing effrontery.



The white portion of the above is space, the shaded line is cork. Ostensibly 1 lb., it weighs only 9 ozs!

At the Weights and Measures Office, Union Road, Newington, S.E., Mr. Webb, the Senior Inspector, has quite a museum of forfeited scales, weights, and measures used in the accumulation of wealth at the expense of a confiding public, and I was recently enabled to inspect the various specimens in company with our photographer, whose results illustrate this article.

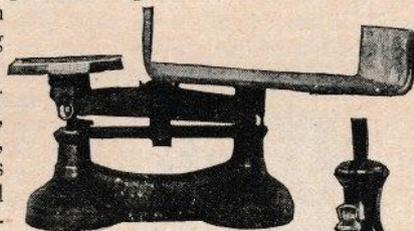
NO. 4C.

To begin with the weights, there is a pile of metal inconsistencies varying in form, but all manipulated with the one object—to give as little value for money as possible. We illustrate a few of the most glaring instances.

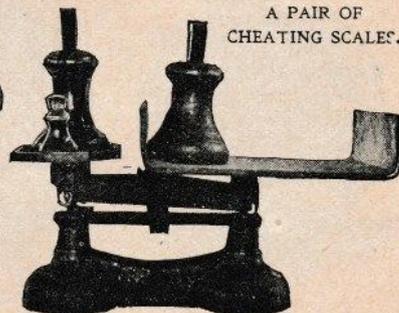
Placed on the counter with the stamp or declaration of weight upwards, those circular metal castings marked 1lb. (16oz. avoirdupois) have an honest, straightforward look about them that helps to inspire confidence into the bosoms of the most doubting of provision-purchasing Didymuses. You can never read the true character of a weight avoirdupois by its face. You must go deeper.

Turn up one of them and you will see what a base, hypocritical humbug it is. One had a series of holes skilfully drilled underneath. That weight was used for years in the shop of a typically "prosperous tradesman." The 16oz. avoirdupois it was supposed to contain proved, on its seizure, to drop all at once to about 9oz.! Is it any wonder that this prosperous purveyor could undercut his neighbours in current prices?

Another of our illustrations represents a brass weight with a solid reputation for 1lb. As



The fraud is worked by the manipulation of the weight on the scale to the right. Weights equaling 8 lbs. are placed on the left-hand scale, and the goods being weighed are placed in the same place as the weight on the right-hand scale. Instead of receiving 8 lbs., the purchaser gets only 7 lbs.



A PAIR OF CHEATING SCALES.

4. - La Boulangère

La boulangère a des écus
Qui ne lui coûtent guère ;
Elle en a, car je les ai vus,
J'ai vu la boulangère
Aux écus,
J'ai vu la boulangère.

« D'où te viennent tous ces écus,
Charmante boulangère ?
— Ils me viennent d'un gros Crésus,
Dont je fais bien l'affaire,
Vois-tu !
Dont je fais bien l'affaire.

A mon four aussi sont venus
De galants militaires ;
Mais je préfère les Crésus
A tous les gens de guerre,
Vois-tu !
A tous les gens de guerre.

Vieilles Chansons



L. G.

Phototypie A. Bergeret et C^m — Nancy.

French Bread

The above postcard appears to date from around 1900 and seems to be one of a series featuring traditional French songs. This one features a jolly little number known as ‘La Boulangère’, or more commonly ‘La Boulangère a des écus’. The écu was originally a gold coin from the reign of Louis IX in the 13th century. In more modern times the word became an informal name for lesser coins or simply a generic term for money. The ‘Boulangère’ of the title has clearly acquired such a great quantity of coins that she can’t be bothered to count them. She is therefore shown checking them on her set of scales, more properly used for weighing out the bread dough. I subsequently found that this song, dating from 1750, is well known in France and attributed to one Jean Gallet.

It is usually described as a children’s nursery rhyme but may not be quite as innocent as first appears. In some sources indeed, it is talked about as being somewhat bawdy in nature. It is seen as containing various double meanings and potentially ribald suggestions. We are very familiar with this phenomenon in ‘hey nonny’ type British folk songs and nursery rhymes, which upon inspection are found to be rife with earthy allusions. We should not really be too surprised therefore to find the same phenomenon elsewhere. The word écu is declared to sound somewhat like the word ‘cul’, a slang word for the ‘derriere’ or bottom. Some will recall the name ‘Oh Calcutta’ which nowadays is likely to be the name of a provincial curry house. In the 1970’s however it was the title of a cheeky musical revue and was declared to be a punning reference to a callipygous lady (*Oh quel cul tu as! Oh what a beautiful ‘bottom’ you have*)

La Boulangère declares that the bags of money come from a very rich man with whom she is 'acquainted'. She is also courted by various gallant military types but for some reason she appears to prefer the attentions of the very rich man.

In addition to those shown on the post card there are additional verses to the song which deal with other aspects of the lady's love life. She is also visited by the local Dandies and some clergymen rock up who offer her flowers instead of money. Strangely these also prove less attractive to the lady than the rich bloke. Eventually however, she is approached by a gentleman who describes himself as a 'Baker of Cythera' which is a Greek island, said to be the birthplace of Aphrodite. Whether he is actually a passing Greek confectioner or is simply declaring himself to be an avid devotee of the Goddess of love is not clear. He does however aver that whilst having neither the money nor the qualities of the other suitors, his talents in kneading the dough by day and assiduously tending the oven at night (nudge, nudge, wink, wink) are well known. We can therefore draw our own conclusions! He goes on to assure the beautiful Boulangère' that she will not be disappointed (see above). She appears to find this offering irresistible and chooses him over the men with the money, flowers etc. It is apparently recommended that the final verses are omitted when it is used as a children's rhyme so that it reverts to an innocent little number about a lady with lots of money.

This song gained yet another dimension when it was adopted by the Revolutionaries during that little bit of Gallic unpleasantness that occurred at the end of the 18th century. Bread or the lack thereof, had been something of a catalyst in the fermentation of the unrest so it is not that strange that it should feature in the aftermath. Bready soubriquets were therefore applied as less than flattering references to members of the Royal Family, as it became increasingly apparent that the monarchy could not be incorporated into the new order. After the Bourbon family was apprehended at Varennes during their attempt to escape in 1791, the Queen, Marie Antoinette was dubbed La Boulangère, the King, Le Boulanger and the Dauphin, Le petit Mitron or Baker's Boy.

In 1875 Jacques Offenbach wrote a comic opera called 'La Boulangère a des écus'. The opera certainly features a rich lady baker but apart from that it appears to have little to do with the original song. As far as I know, the lady's bottom does not feature.

Avery Archive

Our good friend Andrew Lound has been in touch with the latest news on the collections once housed at the Avery Museum. He also has details of some of his latest publications and activities that should prove of some interest to members of our group.

THE LOUND-AVERY ARCHIVE by Andrew P.B. Lound

It was a sad day in November 2014 when the Avery Historical Museum closed its doors for the last time. It had been receiving visitors from around the world since 1927 – although evidence has now emerged that a private museum existed at Avery's for many years before hand, the collection of which became the first artifacts in the AHM. The very last visitors to be given a tour of the museum were two diplomats from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.

The collection of scales, measures and weights remains together and will hopefully be transferred to another museum, Covid-19 has put back the plans. The paper archive amassed since 1927 has been transferred to the Archives at the Library of Birmingham and will over the next few years be catalogued and made available to the public.

As the museum's last curator, I had spent a great deal of time (and money) in improving the collection and researching elements of the history of Avery and weighing. I am grateful that the research material I need to complete my research and studies has been deposited with me forming the Lound-Avery Archive. This archive contains material relating to the history of the Avery Historical Museum, W&T Avery limited, Henry Pooley & Sons, Soho Foundry as well as the history of weighing. The works of the museum's first curator W.A. Benton also form part of the archive including his work on the history of weighing which he was hoping to publish. The archive also contains a large quantity of photographs of the factories of Avery, Pooley and Salter. A photographic archive of the history of Soho Foundry from 1895 to the 1950s is also being maintained and catalogued. It is envisioned that the archive will be made available to researchers directly, at present enquiries may be made to myself and I will try to assist where possible.

My own work will be to publish a history of W&T Avery in several volumes and to make available rare research material. To this end in cooperation with Avery Weigh-Tronix I am scanning a number of rare catalogues the earliest of which dates to the 1830s. These catalogues will assist collectors and enthusiasts in their researches. Each catalogue will be supplied on a compact disc. Discs will be available from December 2020 and ordering details are given below.

W&T Avery catalogues:

c1835, c1840 £20 each +P&P

1897 General, 1897 Special, 1898, 1903, 1906, 1909, 1912, 1915-16 £10 each +P&P

Weighbridges 1898, Automatic Weighers 1926, Tea Machinery 1928 £10 each +P&P

W&T Avery identifications sheets produced for salesmen. £15 +P&P

'Weighing the World 200 years of W&T Avery' hardback book 1930 limited stock £15 +P&P

'The Power of Balance – W&T Avery in the First World War' by Andrew P.B. Lound 2018 softcover book £10 +P&P

Berkel

50 year history book. £15 +P&P

Henry Pooley & Sons catalogues:

C1885, 1904, 1918, 1920, No5116, Automatic Weighing Machines for coal, grain and Liquid 1910. £10 each +P&P

Colour Guide to erecting weighbridges £15 +P&P

De Grave, Short & Co catalogue:

Bullion and Reference balances, beams and weights 1944 £10 +P&P

Toledo

The First Fifty Years Official History £10 +P&P

Fairbanks

One Hundred & Fifty Years booklet £10 +P&P

Additional titles may well be added

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PRESENTATIONS

Due to the present situation I have been unable to visit organizations and venues to perform my presentations. From December I will be able to present presentations on the history of Avery's and Soho Foundry on the Zoom platform. The presentations will have images, music and SFX. Details will be made available on my website, anyone who might be interested can contact me to receive advance notice. Presentations will be:

The Avery Weigh – A brief history of W&T Avery

The Power of Balance – W&T Avery in the First World War

War in the Balance – W&T Avery in the Second World War

December 1940 – The Night they Bombed Soho Foundry

The Victorian Weigh - W&T Avery in the 19th Century

Vulcan's Temple – The Story of Soho Foundry

The Lost World of Soho Foundry – Photographic history of Soho Foundry 1796-2013

Contact: Andrew Lound: enquiries@andrewlound.com

Website: www.andrewlound.com

Skype: andrew.lound

Mob/whatsapp: 07771 904037

Tel: (+44) 0121 356 5446