

FULCRUM

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FULCRUM is the newsletter of ISASC(E), the International Society of Antique Scale Collectors (Europe). It is published in February, May, August and November. Contributions should be sent to the Editor, John Knights.

Swaledale Update

Back in Edition 34 I spoke about some funny Yorkshire units of measure that Julie Davey had seen mentioned on a notice in the window of the Swaledale Museum in Reeth, Yorkshire. Little detail was known about them at the time but she has since discovered that they were units used in connection with mining.

In particular,

BING = 8cwt of dressed ore

MEER = a 30 yard vein of coal

QUARTER CORD = 7.5 yards

STINT = a section of coal face of 8 – 10 yards

PX or NAAFI?

We continue to be contacted by people with scales they have acquired and such is the case with the folding Fairbanks platform machine shown below. This particular chap has found the scale in question and is actually trying to find someone who may be interested in taking it off his hands.

When I saw the machine, I was reminded that we used to come across these from time to time, in the 1960s, on farms and similar premises in rural Lincolnshire where they clearly had no right to be.

The compact folding design is clearly for military use and would probably have been used during the war, by Quartermasters or military cooks in keeping a close eye on the various food rations that passed through their hands.

It would seem, and I find this very hard to believe, that some of these scales went AWOL from their various military establishments and found their way into civilian hands at the end of hostilities.

The scales we encountered out in the wilds were usually considered not legal for trade as, although they carried a broad arrow they had no approval for civilian use. The name Fairbanks of course suggests a machine of transatlantic origin and indeed various

members of the US forces were to be found roaming the east of England during the Second World War.

In rural Lincolnshire in the 1950's various remnants of the foreign military presence could be found. As a child living in a small market town in Lincolnshire I recall that my brother and I were from time to time given, by a friend, mysterious hermetically sealed tins of obvious military origin. When hacked open the contents were revealed to be field rations that had been issued to troops for sustenance in hazardous circumstances. The various foodstuffs within were somewhat unfamiliar to those used to the bland British diet of the post war period. We figured out that these tins must have been used by our transatlantic cousins. We had no idea where our friend was getting these exotic delicacies but after a while, my father, who was a policeman, decided the whole thing was a bit dodgy and forbade us from receiving these clearly illicit items.

Keeping things in proportion

I received word from the gentleman in Tuscany that he had finally received the set of poises that I sent him, via an address in London, at the end of last year. He goes on to say that the four stone has now been successfully instated onto the personal weighing scale which now has a perfectly matched set of poises..

He bemoans the fact that the, now fully working, scale serves to emphasise his degree of Christmas excess, but he is otherwise exceedingly pleased to have got the machine operating properly again.

He has also cleaned up and repainted the rest of the somewhat crusty set that I sent (see below). If anybody else needs one or more of these poises to complete a set he is quite happy to pass it or them on.

If anyone is in this position I shall be happy to put the parties in contact.





A Threepenny Opera

It is now 50 years since British people began to receive decimal coins in their duodecimal loose change. Two shilling and one shilling coins began to be replaced by 10p and 5p coins which were, of course, exact equivalents in both value and size.

This was a precursor to the actual decimalisation of our currency which finally occurred in February 1971. The whole move towards decimalisation was a hugely traumatic experience for some British people who both resented the loss of their traditional coins and feared that they might not cope with the new system.

This was manifested in angry outcries in the letters' pages of newspapers and general harrumphing by some prominent people who took it upon themselves to speak on behalf of the nation about this outrage. Amazingly, on the 40th anniversary of 'D day', 15th February 2011, we saw newspaper pieces bemoaning the day that 'Britain lost its soul' etc. written by people who clearly had too much time on their hands.

Presumably they think we should rejoin all those other countries in the world that retain a non decimal system. These, of course, include Mauritania, Madagascar and absolutely nobody else.

With the inevitable change in the purchasing power of currencies however the subdivision of the principal monetary unit becomes increasingly irrelevant. Many countries have already largely given up on their cents, fillers, eyrirs, stotinkas etc and even the British pound is beginning to look rather like small change rather than the mighty currency of empire.

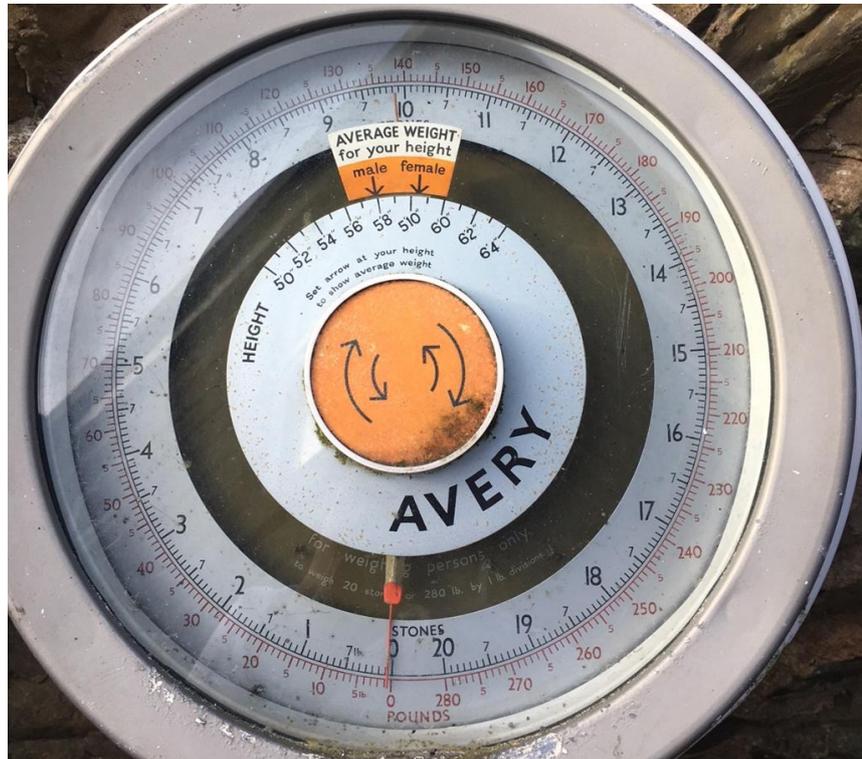
Back in the 1960's, things were very different. A pound was a paper note of great worth that was spent with care, in the expectation that a hefty amount of change would be received. Inflation was very much part of the economy in those days, and stuff was getting more expensive. For many years the coin in the slot personal weighing machine had been operated by the insertion of one large copper penny. By the late sixties things were changing. Below we see an example of a 'coin freed personal weigher' from that era which required the insertion of a 3d piece. The twelve sided brass coin had been introduced in the 1930's to replace the previous tiny silver version and was the only non circular coin in the messy historical mix. The chunky little chap was an oddity much beloved by children as the possession a 'joey' was regarded as a quantum leap from the

pennies and halfpennies and even farthings that mostly rattled around in grubby adolescent pockets in the 1950's. By the late sixties however it had become the price of weighing yourself at the Chemists.



This machine has the 'modern' styling associated with the 1960's, somewhat more appealing than the stark industrial look that was found in earlier decades.

The use of the threepenny bit meant of course that the coin receptor would become unusable in 1971 when presumably it would have been reset to 2p.



In the end there can only be one

Advances in technology rarely occur seamlessly. There is usually a bit of a backlash from the producers whose existing products are being challenged. Renewable sources of energy production are now being developed and installed at a frantic rate to try and alleviate the environmental damage done by traditional fossil fuel generation. There are, however, those still wedded to the burning of these fuels who are trying to comply with environmental requirements by proposing highly complex mechanisms to remove or trap the resulting polluting gasses.

This latter approach is probably doomed to failure but this will not be apparent until some years down the line when the various approaches have been tried and tested. Some 50 years ago the load cell and the force balance were being developed and applied to weighing instruments. The makers of mechanical scales, particularly precision instruments, did not immediately accept these new technologies but sought to produce mechanical systems that would compete with the electronic interlopers.

Thus we saw the ingenious, but ultimately short lived, single pan balance whose simplicity of indication was achieved only by means of a highly complex array of internal gubbins.

Originally developed by the Mettler company the single pan balance was a most impressive device that featured enhanced utility and accuracy for the unskilled operator requiring a high accuracy weighing.

Manipulation of an internally mounted array of weights was achieved by an external knob so it was no longer necessary to continually open and close the balance door and fiddle about with tweezers and ridiculously tiny bits of wire. The weight of the load was indicated on a display so there was no more estimating rest points and adding up the values of the weights on a pan. The main advantageous feature however was that the load pan was always subject to the same load, irrespective of the quantity being weighed thus ensuring that the essential characteristics of the beam remained constant.

Our esteemed Secretary, Thomas Allgeier is the guardian of the name of Stanton, a British scale company who produced precision instruments in the 1950's and 1960's including a range of single pan balances. Via his website, Thomas was approached by a gentleman who had acquired a Stanton CL41 single pan balance (pictured right) which he hoped to use to weigh medication to treat bats, as part of a conservation



project in which he was involved. He had the balance but no instructions as to its use. He was therefore seeking guidance on how to set up and use the machine. Thomas was able to help him on the operation of his scale and advise on its use. Initially it seemed that the balance would be eminently suitable for his purpose given that it could resolve down to 0.1mg using the vernier feature.

In the event, he encountered a major problem, well known to all who have had to operate precision balances in less than ideal conditions. The great enemy of precision weighing is external influences such as air currents temperature variation and especially vibration. The chap obviously had no solid support for his scale and was trying to use it on top of a filing cabinet. This prevented him from obtaining accurate readings so in the end he had to abandon the Stanton.

He instead found an electronic 'balance' which apparently performed somewhat better.

Society Matters

Updated Constitution

The Society constitution has recently been updated to reflect our somewhat altered circumstances and the amended document will be sent to the Charity Commission. The constitution is available on the ISASC(E) website where it can be viewed by members.

Fulcrum

Fulcrum will achieve its 40th edition in August (assuming we can find enough material). Since its beginning in 2008 our little magazine has done quite a lot to raise our profile in the wider world. People searching family history or looking for information about some weird scale they have inherited have often come across our site and got in touch. Apart from anything else this usually gives rise to another article for the newsletter.

Because of its general advantage to the society it is hoped to keep the newsletter going as long as possible. In order to reduce costs however it has been decided to restrict its publication to our website. After this edition, therefore we will no longer be sending out a printed copy.

The on-line copy can, of course be printed out by anyone who feels the need for a paper version.

July Meeting

As previously mentioned, our good friend John Wintour is holding an informal gathering at his premises in the Forest of Dean on Sunday 15th July to which ISASC(E) members are invited.

This will give those attending the chance to explore John's extensive collection and catch up with fellow enthusiasts.

If sufficient members attend it is hoped to complete the AGM that could not be held at the Kegworth meeting last year because of the lack of a quorum.

Those wishing to attend should contact John directly