

FULCRUM

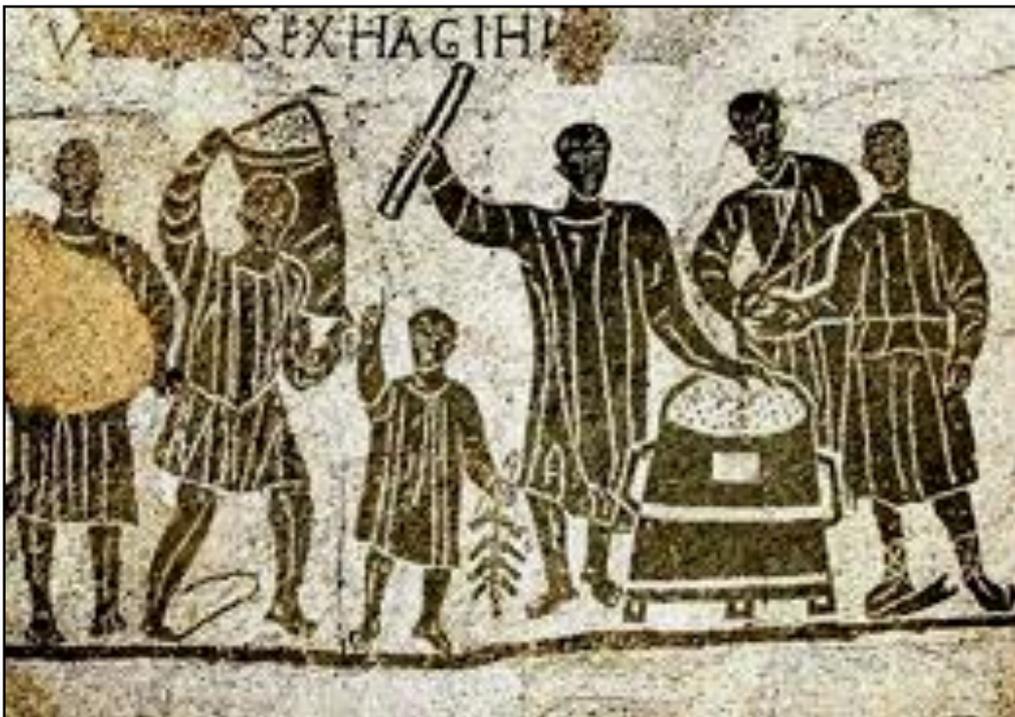
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FULCRUM is the newsletter of ISASC(E), the International Society of Antique Scale Collectors (Europe). It is published in February, May, August and November. Contributions should be sent to the Editor, John Knights.

Striking Image!

On the west coast of Italy stands the town of Ostia which was the port of ancient Rome. Its status as a commercial centre of the classical world is still demonstrated by the **Piazzale delle Corporazioni (Forum of Corporations)** the ruins of which still exist. The commercial life of Ostia is recorded in mosaics on the floor of the forum where the activities of 61



corporations are recorded. The ones of particular interest to us are those showing the activities of the grain traders of Ostia. The one, shown above, illustrates grain being delivered to the trading floor. The official (mensor) is measuring the corn in a large capacity measure and is shown holding aloft his striking rod with which he levels the measure, as shown left.

In a similar vein and demonstrating the continuity of the trade, the post card, shown below, illustrates the town of Gruyères in Switzerland where ancient stone measures, probably of medieval origin are to be seen in the street. The postcard dates from the 1920s but, thankfully the measures are still to be seen in this Alpine town.



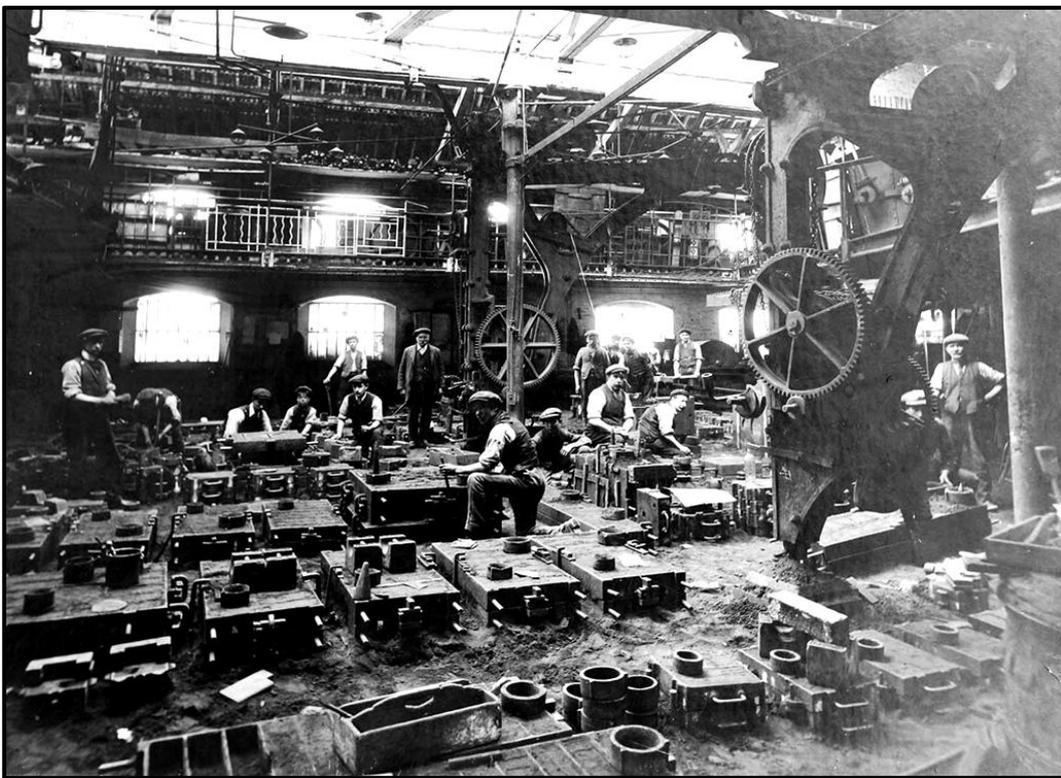
Not a Fishy Story

A few months ago, at the Ardingly Antiques Fair, I bought a pair of iron bar weights marked 1 LB HERRING. It seemed unlikely that they were used for the weighing of herrings, so I searched in the usual places for a scale/weight maker called Herring, but to no avail.



However, a Google search for 'Herring Foundry' produced a surprising result. The iron founders **Herring and Son** were located in **Chertsey**, not far from my home! Supporting evidence that this firm did indeed make the weights was provided by the fact that one of them has a very clear verification mark, VR 483. This was the number used by the inspector in the County Borough of Croydon, from about 1890 until 1901. Croydon is also 'local', being only about 20 km away.

More googling revealed that the Chertsey Museum has a fine collection of items relating to the Herring Foundry, including some catalogues of the firm's products. Clearly, a visit was called for, and was duly arranged thanks to the kindly interest of the curator, Emma Warren. Accompanied by a skilled photographer (Christine), I was able to look through the archives, and happily one of the catalogues, dating from around 1900, did in fact mention that the firm sold weights. There was no picture, presumably because these items were humble in comparison with the magnificent range of Stoves and 'Artistic Ironmongery' that Herrings produced. More evidence was available from an old photograph of the workshop. This showed many kinds of castings, including what look very like 56lb bar weights.



Picture reference CHYMS 1998.161, reproduced here with thanks to the Chertsey Museum and staff.

Norman Biggs

There was a young lady from Cork

We are indebted to Jimmy Earle who has sent us a few pictures taken on his travels. Below we see an unusual scale which he encountered in the USA. He thinks it is of French origin.

He has also sent pictures of standard weights belonging to the Cities of Limerick and Cork in the Irish Republic. The Cork standards are quite a classy set of bronze bell weights, each of which has the city coat of arms cast into the body (below).





A Bit Potty

There must have been a day when somebody suggested, perhaps as a bit of a joke, making weights out of the most unsuitable material possible for such a purpose. The first thought was probably jelly or smoke but they finally decided upon earthenware. This obviously got a bit out of hand and the commercial manufacture of earthenware or pot weights became a reality in the 19th century. What could possibly go wrong?

In the world of collecting of course it is the failed designs that yield the most interesting collectibles and the pot weights that have actually managed to survive are now among the most desirable acquisitions. Above are some examples of the surprising variety of letter fonts and decoration that were used, in the UK which make it very difficult for collectors to acquire a matching set. Other countries also thought that ceramic was a good idea, presumably because the material was hygienic and easy to clean and particularly appropriate for apothecary's weights. We see examples of German and Russian weights (the latter example appears to be made of porcelain which is slightly preferable). The inclusion of a great lump of lead in the weight does rather detract from the hygiene bit. The sorry item, shown bottom left is the only example that I have and illustrates what can go wrong and why earthenware was not such a great idea.

Avery Museum

Some of you may be aware of the disturbing news that Avery Weigh-Tronix have now closed down the Avery Museum on their site at Smethwick. The line currently being spun by the company (a subsidiary of the Illinois Tool Works based in Glenview Illinois) is that they are in talks with another institution, identified as the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery to take the collection. Given the extent of the collection of artefacts and documents that has been accumulated at the museum since its inception in 1927, I fear it is unlikely that all of the pieces of equipment will be successfully accommodated.

Those who have seen the collection will know that the history of weighing technology is represented from the simple beams and steelyards of ancient times, right through the various ingenious types of self- and semi-self indicating scales that the Avery Company produced as the pre-eminent producer of metrology products in the UK and other parts of the world.

We know that there is a problem in accommodating all artefacts of our social and industrial history and that those museums that manage to survive find it difficult to display more than a small proportion of their existing collections. The scales in the Avery collection are arguably mass-produced items made in their thousands which may not be obviously attractive additions to the collections of mainstream museums.

We know however that many of the products of the Avery factories were routinely destroyed for their scrap value and also as a means of removing them from the second hand market so some of the Smethwick exhibits may be verging on the unique. The records are probably even more significant than the hardware and to contemplate the loss of this magnificent collection is truly appalling.

Days to Remember

After the successful meeting at the Warwick Hilton in October we are going with the same venue for our next AGM. **Peter Elliot** has been in touch with the venue and reserved Sunday **11th October 2015**. We have been very impressed with the accommodation and the organisation at this venue and its location makes it readily accessible from all parts of the country. I know it's a long way off but **PUT IT IN YOUR DIARIES!**

The theme and content are yet to be decided and if anyone has any ideas please let your committee know so the wishes of the membership can be accommodated.

More immediately our good friend **Janet Scarratt** has organised a venue for an informal get together in the summer. She has booked a room at the Royal Arms Sutton Cheney with lunch in the dining room. The date is **14th June 2015** the cost is £20.00 per person.