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### It Could Have Been Worse

In pursuit of television programmes that are cheap to produce, the latest trend seems to be to show people acquiring some cast off item, either from the municipal tip or out of the dusty recesses of somebody's outhouse. The item is then 'repurposed', reimagined or even worse, 'up cycled' into some 'desirable' piece that no Chelsea loft can possibly exist without (spoiler alert! It's usually a lamp or coffee table).

When the item is a thing of little intrinsic worth the practice is probably fairly innocuous! Such an artefact can be stripped, sanded to within an inch of its existence (these people love their angle grinders) and lathered in chalky paint without excessively frightening the horses. In such circumstances the practice can even be regarded as ecologically sound as it avoids at least one trip to landfill. Sometimes however a nice item is picked up and subjected to similar garish embellishment that completely ruins any integrity it might have possessed.

On a recent episode of one such programme various items were selected for improvement from the dank recesses of a museum in the great steel city of Sheffield. I was jointly intrigued and horrified when among the items discovered and selected a rather wonderful wooden scale was chosen (Fig.1).

I am a great fan of the wooden scale and thought I'd seen nearly every type by now. This one was a surprise, however as it was a pattern totally unfamiliar to me.



Fig. 1

Technically it would be categorised



Fig. 2



three or four feet (90 – 120 cm) off the ground probably with the intention of their being at work bench height.

There was no mention of a maker and no evidence of a manufacturer's name plate so its origin remained a mystery. Despite its unusual form it did appear to have much in common with the low pattern agricultural machines once made in great profusion in the East of England.

It was clearly a 'vibrating' machine, with a beam that balances when in equilibrium and the ends of the stays were similar to a type known to have been used by one of the makers in the Lincolnshire town of Boston (Fig 2). This is perhaps a clue as to its place of manufacture.

It was marked with a name, (Fig 3), presumably that of its owner, and its use had probably been industrial rather than agricultural (nobody would want to lift a hundredweight sack of potatoes on to those lofty boards). The woodwork was painted, unlike most of the agricultural machines where only the metalwork was coated, again suggesting it was made for indoor use. The wooden plates were sheathed with sheet steel to protect them from damage, probably a modification carried out by the user, and the condition of the steel showed signs of wear from heavy use. Given its location, it would seem the scale had probably been used for weighing parcels of steel.

This was all very good but I was a little apprehensive when I considered what might happen to this neglected but still handsome item once the upcyclers got within rattle can range.

Other chosen pieces were indeed subjected to radical sanding, waxing, recovering and painting but the great scale gods were apparently taking an interest in this item. The woodwork was, inevitably attacked with a power sander, allegedly to remove the 'years of grime'. This did unfortunately also remove the remnants of the original black paint and I had to conclude that a damp cloth would have been somewhat kinder! The megapolishing revealed a red lead paint undercoat and I feared that the Dulux would soon emerge from the cupboard. In the event however, the red colour was left as the final finish. Some evidence of woodworm was revealed so the frame was treated. The steel plates were attacked with the ubiquitous angle grinder but only sufficiently to remove the rust of ages. More importantly no attempt was made to assault with Hammerite!

At the end I had to concede that the scale had been treated reasonably well and the worst thing they did was to put bananas on it (Fig. 4). At least they didn't make it into a coffee table.

## If you're going to San Francisco

To return to the subject of deadweight scales, which I am ever wont to do, I recently received a communication from a member of the US Chapter who had read my piece in *Equilibrium*, 2019 Issue 1 on the subject. This in turn delighted me, in that somebody had actually read the article which even I had to concede was a bit tedious but then horrified me as I realised that what I thought I had known about these scales was wrong.

I had always thought, and had spouted to anyone who would listen, that this type of scale was a typically UK machine that was little found outside these shores. My first hint that this may not altogether be accurate came when I was contacted by a man in the Netherlands who owned such a scale and who told me how popular they had been in his country. This communication led to the *Equilibrium* article which gave me the opportunity to drone on about the technical niceties of these scales and how these newly discovered continental patterns differed from those found in the UK. I thought that this rounded off the matter. I then received the following email!

*John,*

*Your discussion on a low pattern deadweight machine was very interesting to me, in that I have a scale that looks nearly identical to the one pictured in your figure 1. The only identification I can find on mine, as seen in one of the attached pictures, is: Harry Hudson, D Rmskirk, Makers. I find nothing else marked on any part of the scale. The research that I have been able to do has not identified anything about these makers.*

*The story behind this scale is that I bought it in 1986 in an Antique store in San Francisco CA. At that same time, I received a batch of antique hardware on special invite, out of a Hills Brothers Coffee facility that was built on the Embarcadero in 1926. My father was modernizing the facility and making office buildings and Condos out of the old buildings, which were originally the West Coast Head Quarters and Packing Facility for Hills Brothers.*

*There had already been some sales of equipment from the facility prior to my being there, and this scale is assumed to be a part of those sales, partially based on the location of the antique store in close proximity to the Hills Brothers facility. Since the building was built and stocked in the 1920's, and I have other scales that were installed there at that time, and they had a need to weigh bags of coffee beans, it is likely that this scale was also purchased for use about that time. This story cannot be verified because the Antique Store has been gone for many years, but based on what I remember, it is very likely to have worked out this way. Otherwise, it is just a good story.*

*I thought I would pass this information on to you since you had such a good related story.*

*Thanks for writing it.*



Some nice pictures accompanied the email (see above) and a little examination was most illuminating and confusing. Here was a British low pattern scale made by the firm of Harry Hudson of Ormskirk in the North-West of England. This business, as far as I know, was a local firm situated in a medium sized English market town. Not the type of business who would be expected to export scales to the West Coast of America. The scale as shown in the photographs is an accelerating machine, apparently unmodified from the pattern that would have been sold locally. It is a heavy machine with a substantial cast iron frame, much in the style of those produced by the large scale makers such as W & T Avery.



The style of the castings is indeed, very similar to that on a scale produced by Avery (see above), so it is possible that the scale in question was actually made by that company on behalf of the Hudson business in Lancashire.

This still does not explain how or why this humble scale, more at home in the railway yards or on the fish docks of the United Kingdom should have made the unlikely journey across the Atlantic. Surely a machine suitable for weighing sacks of coffee could have been found somewhere in Northern California. Just when you think you know everything about a subject you suddenly realise you know nothing.

### **Tony Morris**

It is with sadness that we note the death of our member and friend Tony Morris. Tony had been seriously ill for some time but remained enthusiastic about our Society until the end. This extended to his recently renewing his membership after it had lapsed during the period of his illness.

Tony was a long time member of ISASC (Europe) and had an interest in scales at the higher precision and accuracy end of the spectrum, such as laboratory, apothecary and jewellery scales.

This fitted in with his career which had always been in supplying, servicing, calibrating and adapting high accuracy balances and other precision metrological equipment.

In the 1960s he worked for Oertling as a service engineer and later worked with many of the well known makes of precision balance such as Sauter, Sartorius, Mettler and Ohaus. He set up his own company, European Instruments, in 1973 which provided high accuracy equipment and operated a range of calibration services.

The company supplied high specification equipment to prestigious and sometimes somewhat secretive organisations and was seen as a business that was able to meet the most demanding metrological requirements.

He was known to appreciate traditional British engineering and owned classic British motor cars which he always drove calmly and courteously.

Despite his appreciation of the old and traditional his business adapted to the requirements of the modern world and still offers a range of 21<sup>st</sup> century metrological services.

The condolences of ISASC (Europe) have been passed onto Tony's family.

