

FULCRUM

EDITION 62

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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.

Working on the Railway

Most countries have a high regard for their railways and consider a reliable service with good rolling stock as something to be proud of. In the UK we seem to be less concerned with our railways or any other form of public transport for that matter. It still seems to be regarded as a second rate means of travel, just as in the days when it was said that anyone over thirty, who finds themselves on public transport should be seen as a failure in life. Our trains have long been in the hands of various private companies, which of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. The problem is that we do seem to keep awarding the contracts to companies who don't have much idea how to operate a train service.

Thus the promised golden sunny uplands of excellence promised when services were handed to the private sector in the 1990's seem just as far away as when trains were run by the despised British Rail.

In the BR days passenger trains carried a lot of parcels etc and even had 'goods vans' attached.

Stations were therefore equipped with copious numbers of weighing machines to ascertain the freight charges for items going on the trains.



The company of Henry Pooley was for many years the main or sole provider of weighing equipment to the railways in the UK.

Railway scales came in various shapes and sizes, from the little parcel scale using a repurposed spring balance surrounded by an ingenious collection of legs and stays (left), up to the weighbridge in the station yard. These were elegant devices with hefty steelyards that rose slowly and majestically when equilibrium was attained.

In between there were platform scales of various capacities scattered around the station.



Above, we see a porter (remember them?) at Waterloo Station in 1960 using one of the smaller platform scales as a seat as he waits for the train to pull in. (It is said we put a man on the moon before we thought about putting wheels on a suitcase).

Wonderful, Wonderful !

Back in 2012, in Edition 14, I featured a Danish fish seller in Copenhagen who was

The title picture of this edition was taken from the UK television programme 'Bargain Hunt', in which contestants visit an Antique Fair or Centre and buy collectables. These are then put up for sale at auction in the often futile attempt to make a profit. The Avery platform machine dial was one of the items featured in this edition. Clearly it is in hopelessly wrecked condition and must have rattled alarmingly when being transported. This programme has a chequered history with scales. They habitually purchase rather tatty old devices with bits hanging off, poises missing, horrible over paint etc, but buying one that is actually in a total wrecked state is surely a new low.



using a traditional steelyard to conduct her transactions on the site of the erstwhile Fish Market.

A film of 1950 shows the same area on Gammel Strand when there were many more of the lady fish sellers conducting their trade in a timeless manner. Like the lady from the 1990's they are in traditional dress and are seated

around the majestic granite statue, erected in 1940 to honour the long standing market.

In less than 20 years the market was gone although the tradition did not entirely vanish. I suspect the lady from the 1990's was required to work in a booth for food hygiene purposes, or perhaps she just didn't fancy sitting in the open air like her hardy predecessors.

The statue of the fish seller disappeared for some while in 2011 while substantial building

works were carried out in the area. It is now, apparently back in its proper situation. I don't know about the token fish lady but there was nobody there when I looked in 2018.

From a strictly metrological point of view one would have to query the mechanics of the weighing process. The fish was placed in a bucket and weighed on a





simple steelyard which had no taring mechanism. It must therefore be assumed that the weight of the bucket was known and allowed for in the final calculation.

The steelyard seen in the 1990's was a traditional Danish instrument but hardly a precision device. It was a turnover steelyard, long prohibited

in the UK and the finest scale is 0 to 4kg by 0.050 kg, ie only 80 scale points in the range. When turned to the coarser scale the range ran from 4 kg to 15kg by 0.1 kg subdivisions ie. 110 scale points, with the added anathema of no zero. This device in no way complies with the current requirements relating to retail weighing within the European Union so such a trader may now be prohibited from operating. It would be nice to think that the practice would still be permitted however, as a living artefact of Danish culture.

Tuns of Fun

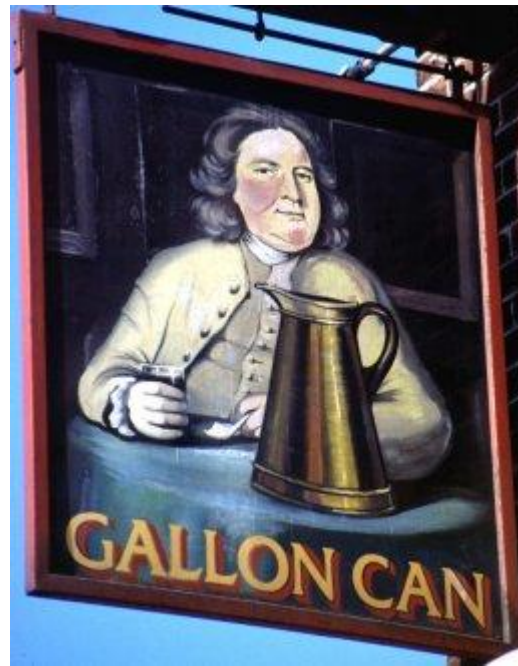
Back in the day, I used to be a keen attender at Folk Clubs which were once a common feature of pubs throughout the land. I particularly remember listening to some American bloke called Paul Simon in the upper room of the Queen's Hotel in Cleethorpes in the 1960's. It must have been the pinnacle of his career!

A song that popped up from time to time from the beardy, 'finger in the ear' brigade, was a traditional ditty called 'The Barley Mow'. This consisted of the performer reciting an ever lengthening list of the names of traditional measures of ale and beer (Folkies were extremely keen on ale and beer) starting with the tiny Half Gill all the way through to the mighty Tun, with the Firkin and Butt being particular favourites with the audience.



A lot of pubs were named after these beery measures. I recall that the town of Great Yarmouth had both a 'Gallon Pot' and a 'Gallon Can' public house.

Four medieval chaps carrying a 'tun' cask. The picture gives a fairly accurate representation of the size of the tun. If it were full of liquid however it would weigh more than a ton (see what I did there?) so I'm not sure four men would be able to carry it. They should probably try rolling it, as intended.



The tun seems a particular favourite, usually in triplicate, as in the Three Tuns. The tun is a mighty cask of 216 gallons so would not

The Gallon Pot and the Gallon Can were former public houses in the Norfolk town of Great Yarmouth. Regrettably, neither premise now operates as a pub. The Gallon Pot was identified by the glorious pillar with the eponymous 'pot' on top. I seem to remember that the 'Gallon Can' once had a 'Haystack' measure above the entrance but I can find no picture showing this.

have been found in the cellar of most pubs. The symbol of the three tuns does appear on the coat of arms of the Worshipful Company of Brewers, one of the great livery companies in the City of London, which probably accounts for its popularity.

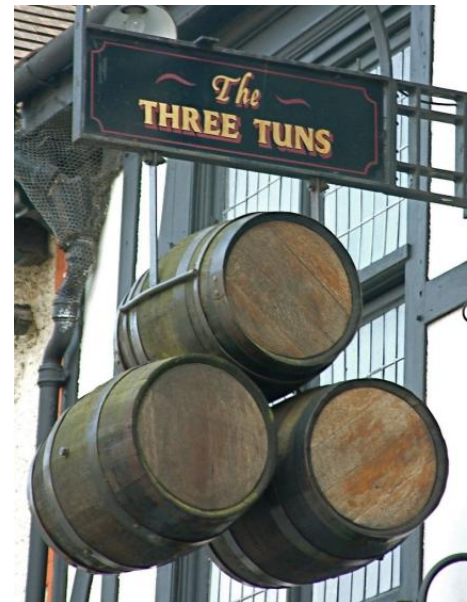


The 'Arms' of the Worshipful Company of Brewers.

The three 'tuns' in their shield was probably the inspiration for the pub name.



An old photograph of the 'Gallon Pot' outside the erstwhile Yarmouth pub. At this time the writing round the base is missing



A particularly spectacular 'Three Tuns' pub sign, on a hostelry in Uxbridge, in the London Borough of Hillingdon.



This ex-pub sign was seen at the Newark Antique Fair and struck me as a little unusual. Instead of portraying one of the various measures associated with wine or beer, it showed a bushel, a dry measure of capacity.

It is an accurate representation of a coopered 'flat' measure, ie one whose diameter equals twice the height.

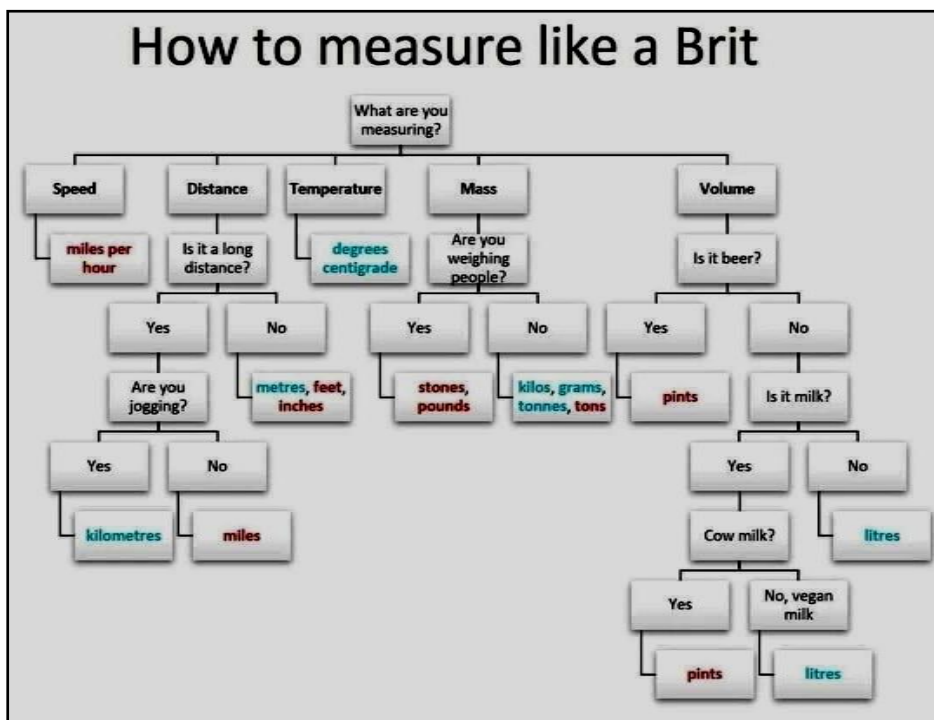
The other pattern, called 'square measures', even though they were round, had the height equal to the diameter and these measures were usually made of bent wood, strengthened with metal bands.

This latter type of measure was also found, made of galvanised steel and, as mentioned in edition 60, woven wicker. Wicker bushels were, usually reserved for measuring freshly picked hops.

The UK is a Foreign Country, They do Things Differently There!

Since metrication (or partial metrication as it should be called) in the UK in 2000, our system of weights and measures has consisted of a motley collection of old and new units, rubbing along somewhat precariously together and trying not to scare the horses (which are still probably measured in 'hands').

I encountered an algorithm shown below, which attempts to explain our current somewhat schizophrenic approach to metrology. It's not a bad attempt although there are a few inconsistencies. I don't think we use tons anymore other than as a metaphor for a large quantity or £100. Road distances are measured in miles and yards, the pint is only used for draught beer and for cows' milk in glass bottles. The metric equivalent, 568ml, does however still feature on some plastic milk containers. As a later addition we have of course now been gifted the much vaunted pint of champagne and other wines as discussed back in Edition 55. This bottle falls somewhat precariously between the existing 375 ml 'half bottle' and the 750 ml standard bottle and seems to be slightly



pointless other than as a bit of vulgar jingoism. I assume it will actually be marked as 568 ml as it now appears that the stupid idea of reverting to imperial units in the UK has mercifully, been quietly dropped.