

The Newsletter of the European Chapter: Edition 10, February 2011

ISASC Exhibition of Postal Scales On 3rd October 2010 the **Writing Equipment Society** (WES) held its annual fair at Kensington Town Hall, a big modern building with lots of space for sellers and exhibitors. ISASC had been invited to hold its October meeting in a spare room, for no charge, but as we had already arranged to go to Kegworth the offer could not be accepted on this occasion. I thought that people who collect writing equipment would be interested in postal scales so I made an exhibition and Ray helped me by driving a very full car to Kensington and helped to set up before the public arrived. Brian Brass kindly came, hovered about and offered information and enthusiasm to the browsers. By the end of the day hundreds of people had wandered past and a good number had stopped to talk and collect our new ISASC leaflet. We also gave out the colour insert produced for our 10th year of EQMs. The display was admired but I made one big mistake! I should have littered the scales with old letters to indicate their purpose. Lots of people actually failed to make the connection which to us would have been obvious. I won't make that mistake again! We were near Brian George's stand where he was exhibiting all the variations of Sheldon pens, scales and compendiums, and selling his book on Sheldon and opposite the Mauchline Ware collectors' stand. They were enchanted by my Mauchline Ware bismar by Andrew Smith as they were previously unaware of its existence. It is to feature in their Journal soon. I have been asked to write an article for the WES Journal, a very smart modern production. Their officers have asked that we exchange Journals so that appropriate information gets disseminated. The officers of WES were very pleased with the exhibition and will, I hope, invite us this year, to exhibit and hold our meeting. This will enable members to wander round the vast bourse and take advantage of a London venue which would normally be beyond our means. **Diana Crawford-Hitchins**



Look Alikes The device below (left) is to be found in the ruins of Leptis Magna in modern day Libya.



The city became part of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC and was an important trading centre. The stone block stands in the market place and was used to measure grain. The pits had holes at the base, which were opened to

allow the measured grain to fall into the buyer's basket underneath. This should not, of course, be confused with any other, superficially similar, multi-holed device. The one shown (right), is part of an excellently preserved '10 holer' at the Wilderspin National School Museum at Barton upon Humber in Lincolnshire.

Old Testament Rogue Traders **Jimmy Earle** provided the reading (below left). The prophet Amos, who was a herdsman and 'fig pincher' (me neither!) was having a bit of a rant against those who defraud the poor by falsifying weights and measures etc. The New Moon and Sabbath were

FIRST READING

(Am 8:4-7)

A reading from the prophet Amos.

Listen to this, you who trample on the needy and try to suppress the poor people of the country, you who say, 'When will New Moon be over so that we can sell our corn, and sabbath, so that we can market our wheat? Then by lowering the bushel, raising the shekel, by swindling and tampering with the scales, we can buy up the poor for money, and the needy for a pair of sandals, and get a price even for the sweeping of the wheat.'

The Lord swears it by the pride of Jacob, 'Never will I forget a single thing you have done.'

This is the word of the Lord.



times when trading was suspended so the traders were itching for them to pass so they could resume their dirty dealings.

The iceman cometh Back in 1998 there was a bit of a discussion in EQM about the weighing and selling of ice in the USA, before the advent of domestic electric refrigerators. I was recently watching a film on daytime television (yes! I know) called Meet Me in St Louis (Clang, Clang, Clang etc) made in the 1940s but set in the eponymous city in 1904. I'm no fan of the musical genre but this film contained a nice bit

featuring a horse drawn waggon, delivering blocks of ice to peoples' houses (left). Sure enough, waggling about on a hook at the back of the waggon was a straight spring balance clearly designed to weigh the blocks at the time of sale. I wondered about the mechanics of such an operation (we discussed it at my weekly 'get a life club') and I finally discovered that the beam, on which the scale hangs, slides out when required and the block is hung on the spring balance using the handling



tongs, seen on the right hand side of the waggon. I'm glad that's sorted out! **John Knights**

Yepsen we have no bananas

We know that traditional units of measurement are often based on the dimensions of parts of the human body. Thus we see the yard based on the length of Henry the First's nose (I may have got that slightly wrong), the hand, the palm, the span, the cubit, the foot and the fathom or toise as the French would say. From these linear measures, areas and volumes were generated which in turn, via the medium of water, allowed standards of weight to be produced. Among these bodily lengthy bits (titter ye not missus!) I once happened upon the **Yepsen**, which is a corporeal measure of volume. Before you get too concerned the **Yepsen** is apparently the volume that can be contained in the two cupped hands. I was unexpectedly reminded of it when I came across a sign outside a shop at Normanby Hall, a Regency erstwhile stately home in Lincolnshire, now run as an amenity by the Local Authority (right). This sign declared '**French Beans and Broad Beans £1 for three handfuls**'. I have come across sales of fruit and veg by ersatz volume, ie various random bowls and similar indeterminate containers (bananas are sometimes sold in this way, which given their eminent countability seems a little perverse). This is the first time however that I've seen such a basic unit employed. The **Yepsen** would equal 2 handfuls so three handfuls would be one and a half **Yepsens**. The sign should read **French Beans and Broad Beans £0.67 per Yepsen**. **John Knights**

Don't be Personal! (Another Tale from the 'Sharp End' of Scale Selling)

The picture in edition 8, showing an Avery coin freed personal weigher being tested, brought back less than cheerful memories of sales activity in this area. I should explain that there were certain obstacles in the way of an Avery salesman entering this particular market. Firstly, despite any technical merit it might have possessed the Avery person scale was an ugly, uninspiring little device, compared with other more aesthetically pleasing weighers already well established in the market (this was a personal opinion I decided not to share with the management). Secondly, some 18,720 seekers after their true weight were required to stand on the wretched thing just to cover the initial outlay and about 1500 more were needed to cover the annual maintenance premium. I was

not convinced such a level of usage was feasible in the long term given that most of the premium locations were already occupied by a more handsome machine by The British Automatic Scale Co. or worse still, by a hugely more impressive 3ft diameter dialled Berkel. Chemists' shops were however seen as a possible area of endeavour. Here clanky old loose weight devices were still the order of the day. These had traditionally been free to use so it was thought that the opportunity to install a revenue raising replacement might be welcomed by the owner. Thus we were dispatched, by the sales managers to Timothy Whites 'et al' to drag them into the shiny new commercial age.

Chemists, or pharmacists as they preferred, considered themselves professional men, somewhat superior to the mere shopkeepers about them in the High Street and infinitely superior to scruffy salesmen dragging dubious devices into their hallowed Asclepian halls. In reality of course the profitability of their business relied largely on sales of cosmetic junk rather than

apothecary, but this did not prevent them from demanding that we made appointments to conduct our business (it has to be said that, as in most walks of life, the few lady chemists we encountered were somewhat less supercilious and much more agreeable to deal with). Getting the scale from the Hillman Husky was in itself a major achievement. It may have been a small scale, as person weighers went, but it was very heavy. Cast iron was still the material of choice at that time. Chemists, sorry, pharmacies, were inevitably situated in no parking areas so a violation ticket was an ever present danger, as was a hernia, as the brute was hauled from vehicle to shop. On the brighter side it was

the case that some pharmacists were getting a bit fed up with their loose poise steelyard machines which, required 'professional' operation by the great man when a client (not customer) required weighing. The prospect of having, instead, a self weighing device that also yielded an income was not therefore wholly abhorrent to even so lofty a personage. On one occasion a suitable 'client' was present as I dragged the bilious yellow monstrosity into the temple of healing and she was prevailed upon to try out the scale. I inserted the requisite penny and the lady stepped on the platform only to leap off in horror declaring that the scale was wrong and that she certainly didn't weigh that much. An awkward situation was developing with a clearly disgruntled 'client' and an allegation of inaccuracy, likely to scupper any prospect of a sale. Clearly someone would be unhappy; I just hoped it wouldn't be me! I assured the pharmacist that the scale was extremely accurate, inserted another coin and hopped on the scale, having confidently announced my weight. The indicated value concurred with my prediction, which clearly didn't please the lady 'client'. I popped in another penny and invited her to try again. This time she had the foresight to remove her substantial overcoat, which she unfortunately draped over her arm before standing on the scale again. The result was as before! In the clanky old steelyard days the pharmacist could have finessed the result to suit the client's expectations but the dial does not lie. The client left in high dudgeon. The professional man tutted somewhat about the unpleasantness but I did point out that as a potential owner of this fine scale he was already 3d up on the deal. Reader he bought that scale! I later moved onto the dizzy heights of Industrial Sales where I only had to deal with Scrap Metal Merchants etc.

Bob Myers

Always Look for the Stamp!

When I was a young trainee Inspector of Weights and Measures, lots of my time was spent acting as an assistant to one of a number of grizzled old misanthropes. Collectively, they taught me a lot – the job was more about dealing with people than I was led to believe at interview. And one point that sticks with me even today is 'always look for the stamp!' I speak of course about the Government Stamp, the majestic Crown with a number below it, which could mean all the difference between a trader being judged fair and above board, or underhand and positively criminal. In those days the stamp on a scale or weight was usually impressed on a lead plug. While the Inspector graciously



An Avery Person weigher, still in use on the streets of York. The white version was made for the Boot's company

provided details of his beverage requirements to the grocer or fishmonger, whose time for the yearly inspection had come around, I was despatched to find the location of whatever weights and scales might be on the premises, to check the stamps before the arduous labour of testing began. Some scales were better looked after than others! Butchers and fishmongers gave them pride of place and cleaned them rigorously, whereas the greengrocer or ironmonger might have theirs hidden down dark passages, under the detritus of a day's business, gnawed at by rodents or spattered with sticky resins. The older scales and weights were quite easy to examine, given enough light and the eyesight of a wizened watchmaker. I learned to make out the vital difference between the Government Stamp (subjected to all sorts of 'wear and tear') and the unadorned lead plug or, horror of horrors, the 'six-pointed star' which betokeneth rejection on a previous test. But scales got trickier as they got more modern. Lead on food-preparation equipment became badly thought of, so the designers took to hiding the location of the stamp. These creative types even took exception to new and repaired machines being hit with a hammer to impress the stamp on the shiny lead plug. Their solution was to have a piece of wire with a lead seal on it tucked away inside the workings. This was where the Section 12 Notices came in handy. These slim pamphlets published by the august Board of Trade in a numbered series starting in 1907 gave technical details of novel weighing machines and other equipment, plus the considered opinion that 'the operation thereof was not likely to facilitate the perpetration of fraud'. In a Kafkaesque bureaucrat's Elysium (which continues to the present day under the soubriquet of 'type approval') each manufacturer's latest innovation was minutely documented with diagrams, text, and photographs. The closing paragraph of each of these documents (with all their amendments) was the key! It stated where the blessed lead plug or seal was *supposed* to be. So as I grew in experience and wisdom I knew what I was looking for, and where to look for it. If I did find it I could even have a stab at which Inspector had last stamped it and in what year. All this came flooding back to me at the ISASC Summer 2010 meeting at Sutton Cheney. John Knights had brought one of his 'robust' collectables in the form of a Lincolnshire wooden deadweight scale. Although a bit rough round the edges and warped with time (the scale was nearly as bad) John waxed lyrical about the machine and all agreed it was a remarkable artefact, a survival from agricultural times past and a fine piece of artisan workmanship. Heavy and unmanageable as it was, I couldn't resist turning it on its side and ferreting out the stamping plug. This yielded up a cleanly-struck crown, number 532 (corresponding to Grimsby where John, as it happens, was himself an Inspector) and the date 1925 (which I think was quite early in John's career!). Thanks to the stamp,

Grimsby stamps through the ages, left to right

Pre 1879 stamp based on the Borough arms

Uniform stamp, showing monarch's initials and inspector's number.

A mark used during the period when the Borough Police force administered the service.

(not quite sure what it was used for)

Stamp used from 1969 onwards. The monarch's initials are now omitted.

Modern 'requalification sticker' used on 'EC' equipment

the provenance was somewhat easier to establish. **Mike Sharpe (Editor's note. 532 was actually my stamp number, although somewhat later than suggested)**

Caveat Emptor Many members will have noticed some

dubious items being sold on eBay recently. Inaccurate descriptions are not unusual and I have stated the Society's position, in general terms on our website. But one specific case continues to give cause for concern and it may be, that in due course, the Society will have to take action to prevent our name being used for commercial purposes. Also, it would be helpful if members who have personal experience of any such problems would share their experiences with myself or our Secretary, Thomas Allgeier. Any information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Norman Biggs – Chair of ISASC(E)

