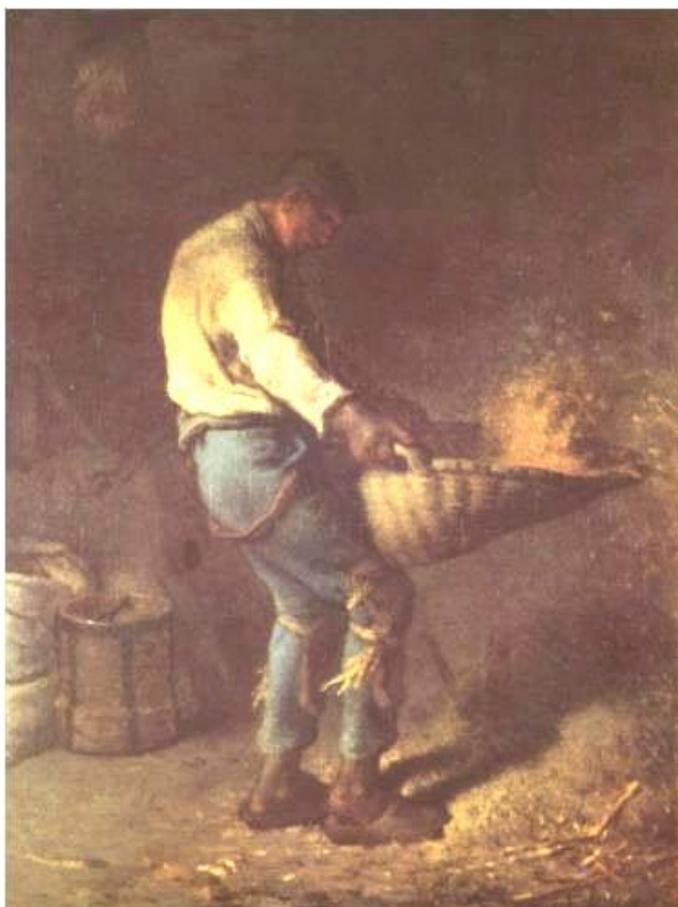


FULCRUM is the newsletter of ISASC(E), the International Society of Antique Scale Collectors (Europe). It is published in February, May, August and November. Contributions should be sent to the Editor, John Knights.



Measuring Up in Art



We are familiar with numerous examples of people weighing things in art, be it Anubis or St Michael checking out the worthiness of the deceased or somewhat creepy individuals avariciously weighing up gold, diamonds and other valuables. Being, by inclination, a 'volumnist' (I probably made that word up) I am also interested in examples of people measuring stuff and have come across one or two examples. The picture above left is a mid 19th century work by the French painter Millet (not to be confused with Millais or the defunct tent shops) and shows a man winnowing grain. Sitting at the back of the barn is a nice bentwood 20 litre measure complete with the striking bar at the rim. On the right is a work from a century earlier by the English artist Hogarth. It is apparently unfinished but shows a 'Shrimp Girl' with a tray of shellfish on her head. Also in the tray is a pewter mug that would have been used to measure out the shrimps. In the UK, shrimps have been sold by volume until recent times. I

expect that, despite the strictures of metrication etc, there are still market stalls in this land with a pint beer glass for doling out the crustaceans.

Spring Meeting

At the informal gathering at Alvington, in April, member **Peter Roche** kindly donated a copy of the Statute of 1357, during the reign of Edward III, on Weights and Measures. Diana is holding the document on behalf of the society and she has sent a letter of appreciation to Peter which is reproduced below.

Dear Peter,

What a wonderful surprise you gave us! The Statute of 1357 was such an important piece of legislation for England and Wales, we need to understand it. Personally I am delighted to see the Norman French beside the English version - and intrigued to see that the French version is considerably shorter than the English version. I expect that anything written in French today will be twice as verbose as an English version! How we have changed!

I've never seen any balances that I could attribute to that early date. In fact, I wonder whether they got round to sending balances as well as weights to every Sheriff. I'd love to see a balance with the weights at Winchester. I must try to find out more.

I hope you enjoyed your day at John Wintour's. As the only committed collector of trade weights and scales, we are very pleased to have access to his displays, and to be able to compare various solutions to the problems of weighing. The rest of us live in ordinary houses without barns to accommodate our collections. Pity!

Our next meeting will be at Warwick, which is quite a drive from Swansea, but we would be delighted to see you there.

With thanks and best wishes

Saintly Weighs

In edition 1, 2009 of EQUILIBRIUM there was an interesting piece on **St Eligus** (aka **St Eloi**) by **Ulrich Biber**. Eligus was a skilled metal worker and goldsmith and was said to be the patron saint, inter alia, of weights and measures inspectors in medieval Portugal. This got me to thinking about a similar saint in the UK.

The obvious equivalent would be **St. Dunstan** a 10th century Archbishop of Canterbury who was also skilled in the metallurgical arts. He was said to have tweaked the Devil's nose with his tongs (a lousy job but somebody had to do it!) which would certainly make him a suitable candidate for sanctification. The metrological credentials are less apparent as weighing and measuring were important but somewhat peripheral to the goldsmith's art.

More mainstream metrological connections could perhaps be ascribed to the Irish saint **Brigit of Kildare**. True, Brigit was less of an upholder of metrological probity than a bit of a fraudster, but that aside she is perfect. Her miracles include the impressive, if somewhat dubious, ability to transmogrify her used bath water into beer but she is

**St Dunstan,
tweaking the
Devil's nose***

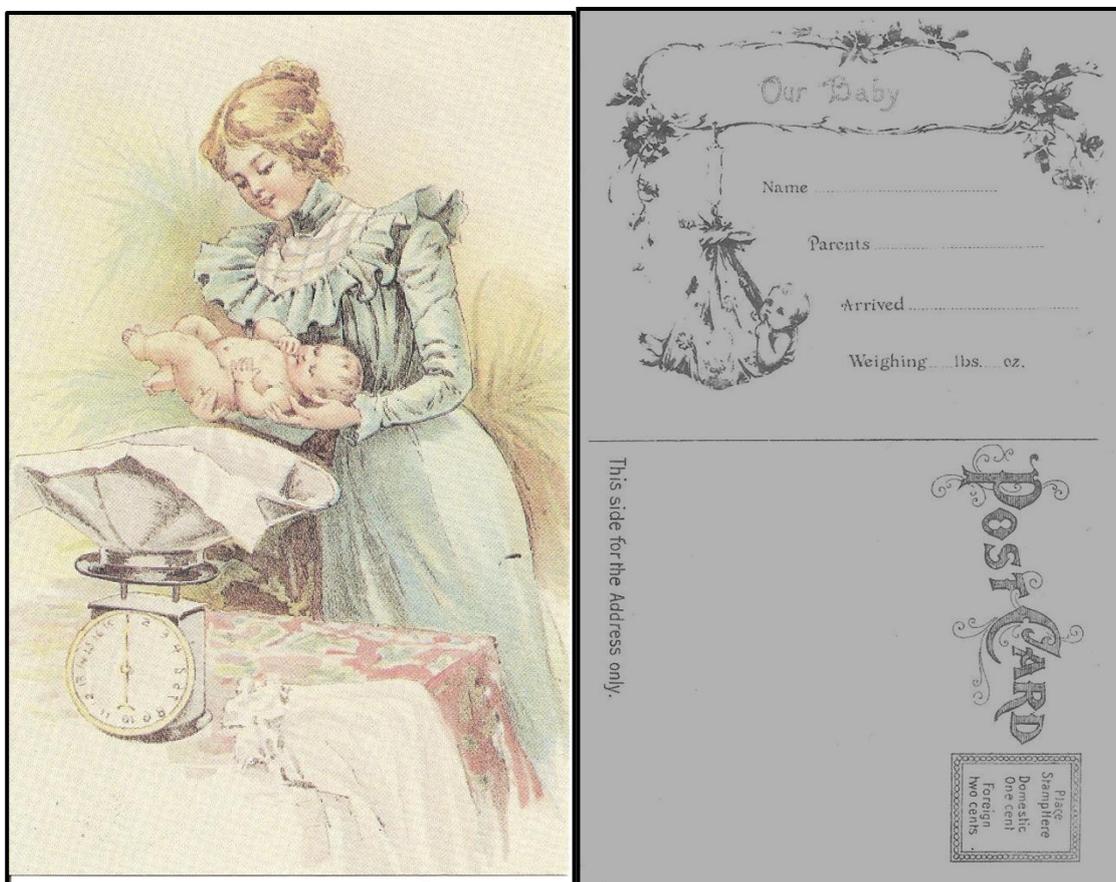


***The Prince of Darkness is apparently saying 'Di thuppothe you think dats thunny!'**

principally known for the miraculous manner in which she established her religious house.

She approached the King of Leinster to ask him to donate an attractive piece of land for her establishment, but found he was none too enthusiastic. She suggested he could surely spare a piece of land no bigger than her cloak, to which he eventually agreed. Her four helpers seized the corners of her cloak and walked away from each other at which the cloak miraculously expanded to cover several acres which she then claimed.

Less saintly but equally devious, was Dido, Queen of Carthage. She also established her city by means of a trick of metrology, albeit without divine assistance. She asked Iarbas, the ruler in those parts for a piece of land to build on but was only granted a plot as large as could be encompassed by an ox hide. The hide was then cut into extremely thin strips and these were laid out to form the circumference of a large circle, giving the maximum area that could be encompassed by the hide. This feat is remembered in 'Dido's Problem', a mathematical proof of the fact that a circle gives the maximum area encompassed by a given perimeter (I may be wrong about that, but as we don't have anyone in the Society who knows anything about maths I should get away with it).



Weighing up Baby!

Another postcard offering from **Kath Malcolm** (above)! Not, this time, a funny one with a fat lady on but a rather gentler example from the Edwardian period apparently, to commemorate the birth of a child. The rear of the card allows the vital statistics to be entered so friends and relatives can be advised of the happy event. The picture shows the baby being weighed on a pedestal spring balance.

Stone the Kilos!

I recently came across another version of the WW1 card showing the newly enlisted soldier weighing himself and wondering why he has put on so much weight. This one (below left) has the caption in both English and French. The thing that strikes me is that there is a problem in converting the stone into kilos in the translation. Two stone equals 12.7 kg so the two stone/ten kilos equivalent is a little conservative. It reminds me of when we had French visitors staying with us last year! They were both fascinated and mystified by our Edwardian bathroom scales denominated in the mysterious stone (below right), and delighted in weighing themselves in, what to them were, meaningless units. They were somewhat disappointed when I was able to give a metric conversion. **John Knights**



Take Aweigh!

One of the historical gems of Lincolnshire, England is the castle at Lincoln. Originally a Norman job built by William I (site of a battle in 1217 that, allegedly, saved us from being ruled by the French), only the walls now remain of the medieval structure. There are, however some interesting 18th and 19th century buildings within that used to contain an early prison. A television programme, in the popular archaeology series **Time Team** examined the history of the institution.

Records of offenders from the 1850s were featured from which it appeared that there was much of the usual larceny going on at that time. One miscreant was banged up for a number of offences, including the theft of a silver watch and a pair of boots. Not mentioned was a further entry that caught my eye, involving the same person. In addition to footwear and horology, the man had also gone in for metrology and stolen **'three stones weights of lead, the property of his master'** (below).

weighing of bullion, in use as currency in various later civilisations before addressing the creation of coinage, initially of precious metals and later of a more token form.

Diana Crawford Hitchens then spoke on the 'End of Tradition and the Beginning of Invention' which dealt with the creation of novel forms of coin scales in 18th and 19th century scales as the detection of forgeries or debased coins became an essential part of everyday commerce. Diana put on a fine display of coin scales and forgery detectors to illustrate the talk (right). We also heard from **Thomas Allgeier** who described the heroic efforts employed to renovate a rare but wrecked Sartorius Ultra-microbalance that he bought for 0.99p on ebay.

After the AGM and an excellent lunch we had brief presentations on East European counter machines, the history of weighing in Iceland and the technology involved in weighing fish on board a trawler at sea. **Peter Kerridge** and **Gordon Maslin** then reported on their recent visit to the Avery Museum and the discussions they had with **Andrew Lound** the curator, about the future plans for this unique collection.

It was an excellent meeting in a good location, and the weekend was, made all the more enjoyable for me by not going to see Titus Andronicus at the RSC.

Some mention was made of arrangements for future meetings. The Warwick location has been pencilled in for the 2014 formal autumn meeting/AGM' on 12 October 2014. *If members prefer another date and advise accordingly*, this date is not yet set in stone. **John Wintour** has proposed an informal get together at Alvington, for those interested, possibly on 16 July 2014 and there is also the possibility of a return to Sutton Cheney, in the spring, for another casual gathering if this is deemed feasible. Watch this space!

Management Committee Bulletin

During the ISASC(E) Management Committee Meeting of 06.10.13 the following points were discussed

Frances Simmons expressed her wish to stand down as Meetings Secretary for personal reasons after

the AGM. However she confirmed that she could contribute towards the updating and management of the ISASC (E) website.

The post of Membership Secretary remains vacant, with **Mike Sharpe** maintaining the membership records and subscription administration. We seek volunteers urgently to fill these vacant posts.

On a more positive note **John Knights** has offered to stand for election as Chairman in 2014, after **Norman Biggs** stands down.

The 2012/13 accounts have been prepared and signed off by the auditor. We continue to make a small annual loss, with assets declining to around £13000.

Membership is stable but we can always do with new members, as this is our only way to increase income.

The 2014 AGM will probably be held at the current venue (Warwick). 1 or 2 informal meetings may be arranged in 2014. **Janet Scarratt** has suggested a visit to Sutton Cheney and **John Wintour** has offered another visit to his museum.

We have been approached by **Hat Trick Productions**, the makers of the television program "**Have I Got News For You**" if we are willing to let them use one of our publications (**Fulcrum**) in their "Guest Publication" round. The Committee's view was that John Knights may proceed in this matter as he sees fit. So watch out for John's rusty pieces of old iron appearing on national television soon. A bit of mickey taking may be worthwhile if it gets us a little publicity.

