



## FULCRUM

The Newsletter of the European Chapter: Issue 3 May 2009

### Spring Meeting

The Spring meeting was held on 5<sup>th</sup> April at the Charnwood Arms, Bardon Hill, Coalville. There were the usual Bourse Tables, giving the 40 or so assembled members the opportunity to enhance their collections.

The theme of the day was Coin and Bullion equipment, as evidenced by some excellent displays, and a number of good presentations on and around that subject were given.

Howard Simmons had a fine selection of weights from ancient cultures (**Fig 1**) and spoke about the development of weighing from the Mesopotamian and ancient Egyptian civilisations through to the use of iron weights by the Vikings. On the way we learned how materials such as haematite, marble and glass had all been used to make weights as well as the more familiar metals such as lead.

Those wacky funsters, Norman Biggs and Bob Myers gave a rollicking presentation on the weighing of coins and notes in the Banking Industry (Boo!) (**Fig 2**). There were many amusing asides into the merit and demerit of various types and makes of equipment, and a surprising conclusion that the whole process of weighing money was largely futile (An EQM article required surely)

Utz Schmidt presented a slick PowerPoint on the subject of the Michigan Scale makers. We all learned more of the history behind such familiar names such as Detroit Computing Scale Co, Michigan Scale Co. and W.F. Stimpson, some of who made applications for pattern approval in the UK at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were often turned down, probably because they appeared a bit 'foreign' to the gentlemen of the Board of Trade.

Jaap Visser spoke about coin scales and counterfeit detectors, concentrating on rockers of Continental and American manufacture. As usual the items used to illustrate the talk engendered much interest, not to mention envy among the aficionados of this class of instrument.

Mike Sharp wound up proceedings with a talk on the estimation of rest point on an undamped balance, demonstrating how it is possible to weigh accurately without having to wait for a free swinging beam to come to rest.

It was an enjoyable meeting, with the only shadow on the horizon being the expressed concern about the falling number of members. This decline must put the long-term health of the Society in some doubt unless new and, dare one say it? younger people can be recruited. Given the contribution that ISASC and its members make to the understanding of the history of the subject of weighing, by their collections and scholarship, it would be criminal if this knowledge were to be lost.

**Fig.1; Older than the Average Weight!**



**Fig. 2; Money Men**



## Management Committee Bulletin

01/2009

During the ISASC (E) Management Committee Meeting of **08.03.09** the following points were discussed:

**Norman Biggs**, after introducing himself as the new Chair, reported on the Society's activities, which are generally going well. Areas for concern are the declining membership and in particular lack of members who are willing to take up Committee positions. As a result we have at present a vacancy in the Publication Officer's post. Special thanks were given to **Mary and Gerry Chellingworth** for their tenure as Publication Officers.

**Ken Govier and Diana Crawford-Hitchins** reported on the project of producing a PC-based copy of Diana's scale maker's database (6000+ entries on cards). This is now turning into a reality with the first scan due to be completed shortly.

**Janet Scarrat** announced the dates and venues for the next three meetings: 05.04.09 (Coalville), 15.07.09 (Sutton Cheney) and 11.10.09 (AGM Kegworth).

**Norman Biggs** then reported on the initial success of Fulcrum. Special thanks were given to **John Knights** for editing this publication and to Mike Sharpe for arranging the production. The Committee agreed that until further notice a new edition of Fulcrum will be published and sent out together with each EQM, typically 4 pages in volume.

**Ken Govier** reported on the Society's accounts, which are in good shape. Moves are underway to appoint a new auditor in view of Vivienne Taylor's wish to stand down after many years of work on behalf of the Society. We wish her well for the future.

**Ken Govier** and **Michael Robinson** will join forces to prepare a new version of the Scale Plate Catalogue, with 48 new plates added. Further copies of the first version will also be re-printed. These will be made available for purchase. The Committee approved the expenditure for their production, which, is expected to be fully recovered by the sale of the catalogues.

The next Management Committee Meeting will be on the **5<sup>th</sup> April, 2009**.

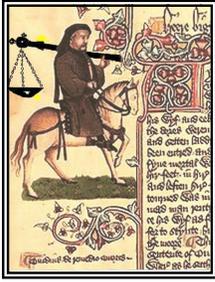
**Thomas Allgeier, Secretary**

### Message to Members, who attended the Meeting at the Charnwood Arms, from Janet Scarrat

Janet would like to thank those who offered good wishes to Noel, following his slight stroke. He was sorry to have to leave the meeting early, but does find excessive noise a problem in his present condition. It would be helpful if friends could avoid too much verbal communication with him, just at the moment, and simply raise a hand of acknowledgement when meeting him. He will hopefully regain his normal composure in the fullness of time and once again be able to fully participate in the Society's activities. As a token of this Janet again extends an invitation to those attending the Sutton Cheney meeting to follow on, as usual, to Lindridge House for the customary hospitality. Janet also wishes to add that she feels the catering, at the hotel was not as good as she had been led to expect and apologises to any one who was disappointed. *(I feel certain no one would be churlish enough to attach any such blame to Janet, who as ever, worked hard to find us a suitable venue at a reasonable price. The odd dodgy dinner in no way detracted from a delightful day. John Knights)*

### Members' Contributions

Those members who regularly attend the Society meetings will already have heard Jack White's reminiscences, gleaned during his career as a weighing machine engineer for the Avery Company. Jack has, now kindly, sent some of his stories to Fulcrum. We can't hope to reproduce Jack's unique delivery style but we hope the essence of the tale is retained.



## The Scaleman's Tale

### No 1: Wheels of Fortune

Once upon a time Britain had industry! Now we have museums of the industry we once had! One such museum is the National Mining Museum at Caphouse near Wakefield in Yorkshire and back in the days when it was a working colliery I serviced the weighbridge over which lorry loads of coal were weighed, as they left the site.

There have always been those who regard a weighbridge as a challenge and are ever on the lookout for ways to 'adjust' its readings to their advantage.

Whilst I was on the site one day I noticed that the usual weighman was missing and I naturally asked where he had gone.

The manager then told me a tale of greed and conspiracy that had inexorably led to the colliery servant in question ending up in prison for fraud.

A customer of the colliery had approached the weighman one day, suggesting that the value of each lorry load of coal could be slightly 'adjusted' by the ploy of leaving one wheel off the weighbridge plate when it was being weighed, thus reducing the gross weight and the quantity of coal paid for. This was among the methods commonly employed for illegal gain. Another method involved boosting the lorry's tare weight by filling the cab with miscellaneous children, dogs and other paraphernalia when the tare weight was taken on the way in. These 'extras' were, of course removed when the full vehicle was re-weighed on the way out. Such ploys should easily be spotted by a competent weighman so were easier to get away with if the weighman cooperated for a share of the illicit profits.

The agreed swindle then began on a regular basis and proved reasonably profitable to both parties. Having got away with this practice for some while however, the two conspirators got greedier and decided to increase the profitability, even more, by leaving two wheels off the plate each time. This of course led to three wheels being left off, and eventually the loaded vehicle was leaving the site without weighing at all, elevating the initial 'fiddle' to all-out theft. All went well until the young son of the manager happened to attend the birthday party of the weighman's son and he afterwards mentioned to his dad, rather enviously, that his friend's family appeared to live in some luxury compared to his own, despite his father's lowly paid job. This innocent remark rung alarm bells and led to enquiries being made, with the inevitable dire consequences for the two conspirators. *If, as they say, you want to know the truth, ask a child!*

PS. I later learned that the weighman was re-employed by the National Coal Board on his release from prison. Those were the days!

### **Jack White**

#### **This Time it's Personal!**

We are indebted to **Kath Malcolm** for another of her delightful seaside postcards, which feature scales. Any weight related seaside postcard usually involves a large lady who, in this case has actually broken the 'penny in the slot' personal scale she is standing on. What is interesting is the cartoonist's idea of what a weighing machine actually looks like. He has given the machine two hands, like a clock and the mechanism flying out of the back also appears more horological than metrological. We don't want to venture into the realms of 'Anorakia' however! We should simply view the card as a nice little piece of social ephemera sent from the Irish resort in the 1930s when, apparently, obesity was seen as a source of amusement rather than the modern threat to individual health and the financial well being of the Health Service.



### Spending a penny whilst spending a penny

'Penny in the slot' personal weighing machines were once very popular and were to be found in many a public toilet throughout the land. Now, much like the public toilet itself they have become a bit of a rarity. They have largely been replaced, in gentlemen's toilets at least, by coin in the slot machines dispensing contraceptives, faux viagra pills and dubious sounding 'pheromone wipes' which are apparently guaranteed to 'boost your pulling power' (these latter dispensers bear the somewhat forlorn injunction 'Please Use Responsibly!'). All very different from the days when male inspectors had to test a large number of weighing machines in both gents' and ladies' facilities. This activity often involved, otherwise respectable public servants lurking around ladies' lavatories and accosting startled women as they came out to enquire if there was anybody still inside; behaviour that would now get one placed on the Sex Offenders' Register.

A particularly bizarre avatar of the Personal Weigher was the 'Speak Your Weight' machine, which had a recorded voice within that announced to the user how much he or she weighed. (There was a popular story, put about at the time, that small people were actually employed to sit inside the machines and shout out the weight. This was probably untrue).

They are almost mythic devices from the past, which often featured in cartoons and jokes (**I wouldn't say my wife is fat but when she got on the speak your weight machine it said 'one at a time please!'** etc) up until their disappearance, from the UK in the 1960s. This rapid demise was probably because they were rather unreliable and could not comply with the accuracy requirements



An Inspector's 'test penny' used to operate the coin-in the-slot machines for test purposes

of the 1965 Regulations. They are now apparently so exceedingly rare that not even the Avery Museum possesses one.

They popped up in a play called '**One Way Pendulum**' by **N.F Simpson**, one of the absurdists of the 1950s and 1960s who wrote surreal farces featuring unlikely characters doing strange things.



The owner of the machine had to post it back to the office, so actually made a loss when the scale was tested

The play features 'Speak Your Weight' machines that have been taught to sing, performing '**You can't chop your Poppa up in Massachusetts**' and a massed choir of scales giving a spirited rendition of the '**Hallelujah Chorus**'.



. The owner of the machines, one **Kirby Groomkirby**, is described in the List of Characters as having '**the gauche ungainliness of the self-absorbed introvert. Takes himself very seriously. Only with his weighing machines is he at all relaxed, and remains even then slightly grotesque. Uneasy and querulous in his rare encounters with people. Dressed entirely in black**' Oh dear!

**John Knights**

On the left is a 'Speak-Your-Weight Machine' cartoon featured in the **Monthly Review**, the trade journal of the **Institute of Inspectors of Weights and Measures Administration** in October 1965.

(It was actually stolen from an East Anglian local newspaper)

**Contributions for FULCRUM should be sent to [johnsknights@btinternet.com](mailto:johnsknights@btinternet.com) or posted to address shown in the Membership List**