

In this issue:

Happy New Year	1
Chairman's New Year message, 2013	1
Chairman to give lecture to Institute of Physics in Scotland	2
Media briefing note	2
Cooking a Poundcake in a Metric Oven Is No Easy Task – at least in the US of A	3
Surprise choice for transport	5
It's Time for the US to Go Metric	7
New Chair wanted	8

usage in the media, in publishing, and in society generally. As it was aimed particularly at experienced writers and journalists, it was necessary to tread a fine line between the strict requirements of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) and the practical requirements of catering for a UK audience accustomed to an incoherent muddle of incompatible measurement units.

Hard copies of the Reference Card have been sent to all the main newspapers, publishers, advertising agencies and a range of public authorities and educational bodies. A pdf of the document can be downloaded from: <http://www.ukma.org.uk/publications/style-guide>

This also carries an alphabetical index version. It is too early yet to assess its impact (which in any case would be difficult to measure), but most comments have been favourable.

Little progress has been made this year with the proposed application for charitable status. This is because it was only at the end of October that the Government finally laid before Parliament the Regulations necessary to allow Charitable Incorporated Organisations to be established. Moreover the timetable accompanying the Regulations indicates that applications from small new charities (which is what UKMA would become) will not be accepted until 2014. So we wait - again.

There is little else to report this year. Now that the EU has dropped out of the UK's metrication process, the media have largely lost interest in the issue, and it has also been difficult to engage the attention of politicians. This is all the more reason why our future role has to be primarily one of education, the disseminating of correct information by all means possible, and equally the dispelling of all the myths that surround the UK's adoption of the metric system.

On a personal note, I informed the 2012 AGM that, after 10 years as Chairman, I intend to give up this post. This certainly does not represent any diminution in my commitment to the cause, but I trust that another member will be able to take over this task and bring a fresh approach and added impetus to the task of challenging the entrenched inertia of our "very British mess."

May I wish UKMA members a Happy New Year and all success in both your personal lives and your campaigning efforts in 2013.

Happy New Year



UKMA would like to wish all members and readers of the newsletter a very happy

and prosperous New Year.

Let's us all continue to strive for progress towards a time when mention of a measurement of any sort is naturally a metric one with no confusion or conversion.

Looking on the bright side, weather reports rarely include a conversion to that strange old system for temperature and even rainfall is increasingly metric only. Maybe the best hope we have is for slow but sure progress.

Chairman's New Year message, 2013



From the UKMA Chairman,
Robin Paice

The main UKMA project in 2012 has been the revised Style Guide, which was launched in June. The outcome of more than 12 months drafting and redrafting, it was an attempt to bring about some improvement in the standard of metric

Chairman to give lecture to Institute of Physics in Scotland

UKMA was approached some months ago by the “Seniors Group” of the Institute of Physics in Scotland to provide a speaker for their meeting at Glasgow University on 22 January. As he has many connections with Scotland and likes revisiting old haunts, UKMA Chairman, Robin Paice, volunteered for this task.



From the programme notes, it appears that the meeting is primarily an opportunity for an annual reunion and convivial lunch (described as “4 courses with wine, waitress service”) in the prestigious surroundings of the famous George Gilbert Scott Building in Glasgow’s West End (pictured above). Nevertheless, Robin is hopeful of making a few recruits, but is mindful that the date almost coincides with Burns Night.

Quotations from the bard relating to weights and measures would be welcome. *(Can any reader help on this? – Ed)*

Media briefing note

From time to time, UKMA is invited by broadcasters or the press to comment on issues related to the metric changeover or to provide a contact to be interviewed. This topic was one of those discussed at our AGM in July, when it was suggested that a briefing note on the issues might be useful for these occasions.

The Committee has now prepared such a media briefing note. It comprises two parts:

(a) Key points to get across:

- Need for a single system that everybody uses
- Reasons why the metric system is better than alternatives
- It’s in the UK’s national interest – not a European issue.

(b) Suggested responses to hostile questions and arguments.

Normally, the task of responding to invitations on behalf of UKMA falls to a Committee member. However, there will be occasions when members have the opportunity as individuals to put the case for completing the metric changeover. So the Committee have decided to circulate the note to all members, and this will be done later in January.

The note does not cover general issues such as effective speaking and presentation.

Cooking a Poundcake in a Metric Oven Is No Easy Task – at least in the US of A

From The Wall Street Journal (Europe edition) November 23, 2012 (*or should that be 23 November 2012 or 2012-11-23? Ed*)

Zach Rodriguez tries to practice what he preaches, which is why he reprogrammed his mother's oven to display 180 degrees Celsius, rather than 356 degrees Fahrenheit.

The 19-year-old college student from San Antonio wanted to make a poundcake. But he is a firm believer in the metric system, so baking in Fahrenheit wouldn't do. He "metricated" the oven using "a complicated, non-intuitive sequence of button pressing," he says.

Mr. Rodriguez is a member of a small, committed group of U.S. metric devotees—the vestige of a once-mighty crusade to get Americans to abandon ounces and inches and a boiling point of 212 degrees in favor of the metric system, where everything is based on the number 10 and water boils at 100 degrees.

While these true believers continue to press other Americans to see the light, some, like Mr. Rodriguez, insist on living metrically, no matter what.

Mr. Rodriguez says his metric cake was delicious. Less enjoyable was his mother's reaction.

"What's wrong with the oven?" she yelled to him from downstairs as his stepfather thumbed the manual to figure out why the oven could no longer be set to the 400 degrees Fahrenheit they needed to roast a chicken.

Buttermilk Pound Cake

★★★★★ Review it | Read (2) Easy



Recipe by: Cathy
This traditional American cake is buttery, sweet and delicious, with the buttermilk ensuring it comes out fantastically moist. This is a great base recipe to use if you are icing a layer cake, or to use in a trifle. Of course, it is delicious as is! Tip: you can use two 20cm or two 23cm round cake tins ... [See more](#)

Ready in 1 hour 55 mins
Saved by 34 cook(s)

Add a picture 1 of 1

Picture by: Allrecipes

Ingredients

Serves: 14

375g plain flour
1/4 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
225g butter
600g caster sugar
6 eggs
1 teaspoon natural lemon extract
1 teaspoon natural vanilla extract
225ml buttermilk

Save to favourites
Email a friend
Print friendly

Like 1
+1 0
Pin it

Buy recipe ingredients
From sainsburys.co.uk

This recipe for 'pound cake' is taken from:

<http://allrecipes.co.uk/recipe/18408/buttermilk-pound-cake.aspx>

American readers will no doubt notice that there is not a mention of cups, ounces or any other old-fashioned measures.

The keepers of America's metric flame are the roughly 300 members of the U.S. Metric Association. By most measures, their efforts in recent decades have failed.

Since the 1970s—when the metric association had about 900 members and President Gerald Ford signed the Metric Conversion Act of 1975, a law intended to convert the U.S. to metric—the U.S. metric movement has made little progress in getting the general public to adopt the gram, liter and meter.

Now, there are scant mainstream efforts in the U.S. to metricate beyond a few fields such as science, medicine, alcohol and the illegal-drug trade. While the 2-liter soda bottle has become standard and many doctors' scales include metric and standard U.S. measurements, most of America lives in inches, feet and pounds. The U.S. is now pretty much alone among developed nations in eschewing metric measurements, commonly referred to as the International System of Units, or SI.

"Popular opinion in this country is antimetric in that it often perceives the metric system as a joke," says metric-association Vice President Paul Trusten, a 60-year-old Midland, Texas pharmacist.

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

The association, pushing metric since 1916, aims to change that. Members regularly write to government agencies urging metric-system adoption. It approves Certified Metrication Specialists, who are considered qualified to advise companies and government agencies on going metric. "If we are considered keepers of the flame," Mr. Trusten says, "it's because the rest of the country is in darkness."

Still, even the popularity of TV shows and cookbooks from foreign chefs like Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson who use metric recipes doesn't seem to have swayed the U.S. populace.

Metric proponents continue to press other Americans to see the light. Some seek hope in tiny triumphs. There is the Maybelline OR.FR -1.05% eyelash lengthener, for example. USMA member Howard Ressel, a Rochester, N.Y., engineer, saw it on television early this year, with ad copy touting "4 mm of measurable extensions!" (Or about 0.16 inch for the uninitiated).

The ad showed companies realize U.S. consumers can digest metric, says Mr. Ressel, 50. A Maybelline spokeswoman declined to comment on the ads. *(No surprise there - Ed.)*

In June, Mr. Rodriguez alerted members to a box of store-brand cornflakes from H-E-B Grocery Co. in Texas: Its nutrition label used the metric "kilojoules" alongside the customary "calories," used to denote the amount of energy contained in a serving. "The fact that it's there at all, sharing the stage with kilocalories, with kilojoules as the primary unit, is delightful," he wrote. An H-E-B spokeswoman said she had no information on the kilojoule notation. *(Also no surprise there, but who makes the decisions? - Ed.)*

Metric mavens are more used to getting the short end of the yardstick. Mr. Trusten, the association vice president, last year issued a "call to arms" for members to write to then-U.S. Secretary of Commerce John Bryson and urge him to press companies to adopt the metric system. Association members say they got no response. A Commerce spokeswoman says the department can't find any such letters.

While they wait for converts, purists go to great lengths to convert their own lives. Mike Payne, a pilot from Potomac Falls, Va., says he paid about \$100 to have a Honda dealership replace his Civic's speedometer with a dial featuring kilometers-per-hour in large type.

Pierre Abbat, a Charlotte, N.C., computer engineer, stayed strictly metric when designing a house this year. His plans for the 20.6-meter-long building call for 20.32-centimeter-high cement bricks (8 inches) and plywood sheets of 121.92 x 243.84 centimeters (4 feet by 8 feet). *(That's not metrication - Ed, again. It's as bad as UK builder's suppliers advertising doors at 1981 mm x 762 mm)*

He just needed a metric-only tape measure. Many are printed with inches and centimeters, but those wouldn't do since the inch marks just get in the way.

Mr. Abbat, 48, was glad to find a made-in-U.S.A. metric-only model on Stanley Black & Decker Inc.'s SWK +1.94% website. He wrote to the company. A representative told him the tapes aren't for sale in the U.S. Most of the other tapes he found online also had nonmetric measurements.

Stanley makes metric-only tapes in New Britain, Conn., says Tom Chang, Stanley's tape-measure product manager. "We ship to Europe, we ship to Asia, we ship to Latin America," he says, but despite his sales force's efforts, U.S. stores won't stock them so "they don't get sold in America."

Mr. Abbat turned to metric-association members for advice. One said he got a metric-only tape from a Russian railway worker; another bought his in Germany. Mr. Abbat finally found one on a boating-supply website. Metric is natural for him, he says: "I've been measuring in metric since I played with 16mm Legos as a kid."

The metric association's Mr. Trusten says he appreciates members who use the system in everyday life whenever possible.

Often, it isn't. When Mr. Payne, the pilot, wanted to buy a trailer, he called nearly every trailer maker in the country "and insisted they send me a brochure or anything they may have that gave dimensions and weight in SI metric units." None obliged, and he says he won't buy a trailer until one does.

For 10 years, Robert Bullard, a New Smyrna Beach, Fla., building engineer, took only clients who let him draw plans in metric, rather than the U.S. system known as "customary" measurements that stem partly from archaic British units. "I despise the English system," he says. "I said, 'I'm drawing a line in the sand.'"

But five years ago, he had to give an inch: He couldn't afford to lose any business, so he began accepting projects with some standard measurements. Plans he drew for a drainage pond this year, for example, call for 40.64-centimeter-long masonry blocks but had to be based on U.S. government-produced maps with elevation in feet, since the federal authorities doesn't use metric for topographic measurements. Compromising his principles, he says, makes him feel "rotten."

Surprise choice for transport

Posted on MetricViews 2012-11-30 by derekp

This was the headline in a back number of a trade magazine that recently came to our attention. So who was this choice, why the surprise, and when was he or she chosen for transport?

Not in May 2010, when Philip Hammond MP, who had been Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury in opposition, became Secretary of State for Transport in the present government, and when Norman Baker MP, whose interests are said to be civil liberties and environment, became Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Regional and Local Transport). In fact, we have to go back four decades to the general election of 1970, and to an article in Commercial Motor Magazine of 26 June of that year to find the cryptic headline and the answers to our questions.

The article began:

"The Prime Minister's choice of John Peyton as Minister of Transport is a surprise appointment.

Although a former chairman of the Conservative backbench MPs' transport committee, Mr Peyton's preoccupations in recent years have been the coal and steel industries.

His only incursion into the transport field which can immediately be recalled was his sponsorship in 1962 of a Bill to amend the road vehicle licensing laws to enable a group of people to legally hire a taxi to take them to work ..."

Mr Peyton however had a pivotal role in creating today's measurement muddle – it was he who accepted Transport Ministry officials' advice that the changeover of road traffic signs should be postponed. Later in 1972, there was a Ministerial statement which said that *"the Government had no alternative date in mind"* for the changeover of road signs. This is perhaps the first example of a lack of joined-up government policy on measurement units involving the UK Department for Transport (DfT).

Mr Peyton's lack of vision in 1972 is disappointing but perhaps understandable, given the absence at that time of obvious progress with the post-war metric transition, either in the UK or around the world.

For example:

- UK chemist shops and pharmacies had changed to dispensing medicines in metric measures in 1968, and grains, scruples and drachms had been consigned to history. This change could easily have escaped most people's attention.
- The construction industry had begun to design new projects in metric in 1969, but few of these would have seen the light of day three years later.
- Most UK manufacturing industries, including the motor industry, were users of pound inch units, as were shipyards and the aerospace industry.
- There were still forty or so non-metric countries around the world, including most Commonwealth countries.
- The Apollo program (1963-75), which had sent men to the Moon from Cape Kennedy (with inch spanners) was still fresh in people's minds.

Forty years on, there has been a dramatic change:

- Our shopping basket has gone metric, from packaging of groceries to the weighing of loose fruit and veg. And much else in the high streets and retail parks, from carpets to kitchens, is also described or priced in metric measures.
- The successful metric transition of the UK construction industry has enabled our architects and design engineers to establish a major presence in world markets.
- Our motor industry, now dominated by foreign-owned firms such as BMW, Honda and Toyota, is metric and a major UK employer and exporter.
- Shipbuilding, which was slow to adopt metric measures, has become a shadow of its former self.
- Our aerospace industry is dominated by Airbus maker EADS, which now rivals Boeing.
- Fewer than 5 countries around the world have not adopted metric as their primary system of measurement.
- The US Space Shuttle has been taken out of service, and astronauts now travel to and from the international space station in a Russian-built Soyuz rockets, widely considered the world's safest, most cost-effective human space flight system.

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

So do Peyton's successors today take a different view on the matter of joined-up government policy on measurement units? You might expect so, but you would be wrong.

In June 2010, when a proposal for dual marking of height and width restrictions came before Philip Hammond, he said:

"Today I am scrapping Labour's plans to force councils to spend £2 million changing road signs to include metric measurements."

In fact, this change would have saved money, and Hammond's decision appears both irrational and perverse.

And then Norman Baker, when replying to an enquiry forwarded to him by an MP from a constituent, said only last week:

"... there are no plans to change the law to allow the conversion of traffic signs in Great Britain to metric measurements."

So it would seem that the ghost of that surprise choice, Mr Peyton, lives on at the DfT, influencing its policy on joined-up government in relation to measurement units. Indeed, it has been said that there are now only three domains in the world not committed to a metric transition: Burma, Liberia and the UK DfT.

And the United States? The USA has been committed since the mid 1970s to the transition from US customary to metric units for most purposes. But it is also committed to the freedom of key players to do nothing, thereby demonstrating once again the futility of this approach – see the Metric Views article on the 1862 Select Committee report.

The Commercial Motor article of June 1970 concluded by saying that Mr Peyton would draw a salary of £8500 as Minister of Transport. So there is at least one thing that has changed at the Transport Department over the past forty years.

In one of many replies - BrianAC says:

Aren't they all surprises?

I am still reeling from Earnest (on 'yer bike) Marples.

But then, maybe that is what we need now, a minister for transport that owns a road traffic signs company, that has a vested interest in changing all the countries road traffic signs.

(Marples owned a road and bridge construction company, strangely did very well too. A time of massive road expansion in UK).

I can see no other way we will get the metrication job done.

From the Editor:

To derekp and BrianAC, here is an example of extreme muddle – a picture taken in Norfolk recently. I expect that no-one noticed that one metric-only temporary sign was immediately followed by an imperial-only one (and an imperial speed limit sign). Maybe no-one noticed of any of them!



It's Time for the US to Go Metric

Jamie Condliffe – Jan 2, 2013 (2 Jan 2013 or 2013-1-2 Ed)

The link for this article was sent by UKMA member Roderick Urquhart who says :

I did see this link on a US website <http://gizmodo.com/5972438/its-time-for-the-us-to-go-metric?post=55732519>

I do not think I have previously seen a call for metrication in the US. The reactions seem even more anti than would be normal here in the UK - Steve Wozniak (Apple co-founder) thinks that we should all be working in binary!! Strangely some look to the UK as a reason not to go metric - while they should look at say Germany or South Korea as a better example.

The US has a love affair with imperial units: height in inches, milk in quarts, weight in pounds. You name it, and it's measured in imperial. The only problem? Imperial is dumb. So let's cast off those shackles and join the rest of the world by embracing units that make sense. Let's go metric, once and for all.

The US is one of the few countries left in the world which is yet to convert to metric, and this petition is lobbying the nation's lawmakers to change that. It was created on December 31st and is yet to gain much traction—so it needs your help to give it a push. Why make the move? A (metric) ton of reasons.

Imperial is archaic and irrelevant

Let's take a step back. Imperial measurements have roots which can be traced back—sketchily—though Egyptian and Persian history, though the first occurrence of a measure we all know can be found written out in the Magna Carta, signed in 1215, that reads:

"There shall be one measure of wine throughout our whole realm, and one measure of ale and one measure of corn—namely, the London quart;—and one width of dyed and russet and hauberk cloths—namely, two ells below the selvage...."

Priorities. Anyway, the imperial units we now know slowly evolved over next 600 years, being added to as and when required. Eventually, they were gathered together and made official in the United Kingdom in 1824 by a Weights and Measures Act. US weights and measures are—very subtly—different to those in the UK, and were made official in the Mendenhall Order of 1893. It was updated in 1959, sure, but its roots are in a bygone age and, as a result, they now make little sense.

There are too many imperial units

The imperial measurement system employs completely different units for each measurement—and each one can be measured using one of many different units. If that doesn't make much sense, let's try a small comparison. Take, for instance, units of volume. In imperial, you can take your pick from:

gallon, liquid quart, dry quart, liquid pint, dry pint, fluid ounce, teaspoon, tablespoon, minim, fluid dram, gill, peck, bushel, cubic inch, cubic foot, cubic yard, cubic fathom, cubic rod, cubic furlong, cubic mile, cubic league, cubic mil, cubic pole, cubic perch, cubic hand, cubic link, cubic chain

In metric, that list is a little shorter:

Liter (*should really include cubic metre – Ed*)

OK, so you have to include a prefix to shift by factors of ten—centi means a hundredth, milli means a thousandth, kilo means a thousand, and so on—but you only need to understand one fundamental measure. The rest is about scaling.

It's impossible to scale imperial easily

And that scaling is hugely important. Think about how you shift between length scales in your head: in imperial, there's no consistency. You have 12 inches in a foot, 3 feet in a yard, 1,760 yards in a mile. There is no neat way to jump between those units without tortuous mental arithmetic.

Conversely, metric units rely entirely on factors of ten—perhaps the easiest mental arithmetic possible. The best bit, of course, is that metric prefixes apply to each and every metric measurement: move to volume, or weight, or whatever, and they work just the same. You only have to learn one rule, and from then on things are easy.

And that's the wonderful, beautiful thing about metric: it's beguilingly simple and, as a result, extremely powerful. The fact that the US—perhaps the world's leading technological and scientific power—chooses to make life more difficult for itself by using an archaic set of measures is mind-boggling. The fact that at times the refusal to change creates a measurement barrier which makes collaborative work between countries almost impossible is a joke. It's time to change that. It's time to leave inches and yards behind, and embrace a glorious metered future (*shouldn't that be metric? – Ed*).

New Chair wanted

As reported in his New Year message, Robin Paice has indicated that, after a 10 year stint, he does not wish to be nominated again for the post of Chair of UKMA. We therefore need to find a replacement.

The job description agreed by the Committee in 2003 reads as follows:

“The Chairman is the most senior officer of the UK Metric Association. As such the Chairman is expected to be responsible for the following:

- Overall management to ensure that the business of UKMA is conducted in an orderly and efficient way.
- To chair meetings of the committee
- To chair any General Meetings, including the AGM
- •To be the public “figurehead” of UKMA. For example most quotes given in a press release will be attributed to the Chairperson.

Other responsibilities

Main contact to Parliamentary friends, especially Lord Howe

(Joint) Web editor for website

Signatory for UKMA bank account

May chair or participate in working groups.”

(To this should be added joint responsibility for editing the blog “MetricViews”).

Ideally, in order to ensure a smooth transition, the next Chair should be a current or former member of the Committee – but this is not essential.

Nominations will be formally opened in April/May, but it would be helpful if potential candidates could be thinking about it and make themselves known as soon as possible. Robin points out that any job is largely what you make of it, and the time devoted to it is very much at the discretion of the post-holder.