



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association
For a **single** *rational* system of measurement

Volume 18, No. 2

ukma.org.uk

June 2020

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2020 AGM and Conference

There will be a virtual AGM. This will be held on Sunday 26 July 2020 at 10:15. It will be followed by a shortened Annual Conference, also on-line. The agenda of the AGM, joining instructions and the programme for the Conference will be emailed to members in mid-July.

Committee 2020-21

The election for the Committee for the 12 months from 26 July is now under way. Results will be announced at the end of June.

Covid-19

This edition of UKMA News includes a number of articles on the pandemic including one reprinted from our blog, Metric Views. In recent years, successive Committees have given particular attention to our main web site, www.ukma.org.uk, and to our presence on social media. It is hoped that members are satisfied that UKMA was well prepared for the unusual circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

Editor of UKMA News

The Committee is looking for a volunteer to take on the role of editor and if you think this might interest you, please contact the Secretary, secretary@metric.org.uk

Rudimentary desktop publishing skills and a few spare hours every three months are all that you will need.

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Association News

A very British mess”

This report, published by UKMA in 2004, looked at the UK's measurement muddle. The Foreword was written by the late Lord Howe, then UKMA's Patron, and the report was drafted by a group of Committee members. The 62-page report includes chapters on “How did we get into this mess?” and how we can get out of it, with many illustrations in full colour. Hard copies of the report are still available, price £2.00 including p&p. Please email the Secretary if you would like a copy.

Building Metrication News (BMN)

The whole series of BMN, published in the magazine *Building* between 1967 and 1976, is now available on our main web site: <https://ukma.org.uk/what-is-metric/uk-progress/building-industry/>

An introduction to BMN appears in the last edition of this newsletter.

Correction - Press Officer

It was Alex McDowell who volunteered to take on the role of Press Officer for UKMA.

How to unsubscribe

If you do not wish to receive UKMA News, please email the Secretary.

Recent articles posted on Metric Views

Here is a summary of the articles posted on Metric Views, www.metricviews.org.uk, since the last newsletter:

“Watch 'Decimalisation (1970)' on YouTube.” Posted on 15 February. 22 comments.

“1819 – a massacre and an opportunity.” Posted on 25 February. 1 comment.

“No surprises in YouGov survey.” Posted on 15 March. 5 comments.

“Experts weigh in.” Posted on 6 April. 2 comments.

“2 metre social distancing is well understood.” Posted on 16 April. 39 comments.

“The 'traditional' pint.” Posted on 1 May. 21 comments.

“Covid-19, weight and your bathroom scales.” Posted on 8 May. 13 comments.

“New speed limit in central London.” Posted 22 May. 10 comments.

Two of these articles are reprinted in this edition of UKMA News.

Draft articles for Metric Views are welcome and should be e-mailed to: secretary@metric.org.uk

Metrication Matters

Members who attended the AGM and Conference in 2007 will remember the talk by Pat Naughtin, an Australian who had participated in that country's successful metric changeover. Pat has written about his contribution as follows:

“It all happened by accident really. I was asked if I could help a building company with their metrication program. I innocently said “yes” not knowing that this would lead to a lifetime fascination with the mental, moral and social processes that individuals, groups, companies, industries and nations use for a profound industrial change - such as a change of measurement.”

Pat died, alas, in 2011, but his partner, Wendy, has made arrangements for many of the resources he assembled to remain available on the internet. They may be found at:

www.metricationmatters.com/ .

No muddle on milk labels

Here is a compilation of ASDA milk labels sent in by one of our readers:



What? No mixture of measurement units? No muddle? No “traditional” pints?

The paradox of the “traditional” pint was considered in a recent article on Metric Views which is reprinted on the next page.

The “traditional” pint

It seems it will be a while before we are able to return to the pub and enjoy our favourite tipple while socialising with our friends. In the mean time, Metric Views points to a paradox that some may wish to ponder over their pint.

Following on from our previous article about the opportunities missed in the Government review of weights and measures 200 years ago, it is interesting that, in 1819, the “First Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Consider Weights and Measures” included a recommendation for a new gallon (and pint).

The report noted that at least three different gallon standards were used, and recommended the introduction of a single new standard gallon which would be defined as the volume containing exactly 10 pounds avoirdupois of distilled water at 62 °F, an amount that could be divided decimally if desired. This had the knock-on effect of defining a new standard pint, which, being equal to one eighth of a gallon, would henceforth be defined as the volume occupied by 1¼ pounds, or 20 ounces, of distilled water at 62 °F.

The report speculates that the consequent introduction of a new standard measure for beer would cause “*very little inconvenience*” to the public “*especially when it is considered that the standards, by which the quart and pint beer measures, used in London, are habitually adjusted*”.

It is ironic that, 200 years ago, the Government lacked the courage to take a radical approach in their efforts to rationalise the country’s weights and measures, but were unconcerned about making changes to the “pint” of beer.

Nowadays the “pint” has become a cause célèbre for opponents of metrication, and decades after food and drink went metric, some politicians continue to resist efforts to switch the measurement of draught beer to metric units, because of the pint’s supposed ancient heritage. Whereas in fact it was historically quite recently that the current size of the pint was defined, and if there is any tradition at all, it is that the pint is a measure that has been subject to frequent regulatory change. The current imperial pint is actually a newer unit than the litre and millilitre.

It is also worth noting that this change ensured that the measures for volume used in the British Isles and later the British Empire would diverge significantly from those used in the United States of America.

For further reading see <https://ukma.org.uk/press/extracts-from-key-reports/#1819>

About this newsletter

UKMA News is published by the UK Metric Association, the object of which is to promote the full adoption of the International System of Units (SI), commonly known as ‘the metric system’, as the legal and default system of weights and measures throughout society in the United Kingdom.

Your feedback and comments on UKMA News or on the UK’s stalled metric upgrade are welcome. To submit, or if you no longer wish to receive UKMA News, please e-mail secretary@metric.org.uk

UKMA News – the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Can you help?

The Committee is looking for volunteers who may be able to help in the following areas:

- Responding to technical consultations by ISO and BSI.
- Preparing web-friendly versions of UKMA News for PCs, i-pads, i-phones and android devices such as tablets and mobile phones.
- Reviewing printed media for stories to link to our Twitter and Facebook pages.
- Assisting with the production of material for uploading to YouTube.

If you think you may be able to help, please contact secretary@metric.org.uk

Where to find UKMA on the internet

UKMA began as an internet forum, and the internet is our principal vehicle for carrying our message to the public. We now have:

The main UKMA web site, www.ukma.org.uk

A factual web site, www.thinkmetric.org.uk

A blog, www.metricviews.org.uk

A Twitter page, <http://twitter.com/UKMetric>

A YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/user/UKMetric

These are available to all, not just members.

There is also a Facebook page and a Facebook group.

Covid-19, 2 metre social distancing and a queue 1 km long



Many UKMA members will have read of the queue of Members of Parliament to vote recently.

Newspapers reported it was “1 km” long. How come?

$500 \text{ MPs} \times 2 \text{ m social distance} = 1000 \text{ m} = 1 \text{ km}$. Simple!

This photo of the queue of MPs in Westminster Hall was tweeted by Layla Moran,

<https://twitter.com/LaylaMoran/status/1267829063499919360>

One of our Committee members, Ronnie Cohen, posted an article on Covid-19 on Metric Views on 16 April. It became the most popular article of the last four months, measured by the number of comments. It is reprinted below.

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Two-metre social distancing is well understood

We are now several weeks into the lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus (also known as COVID-19). Ronnie Cohen, one of our frequent contributors, looks at a particular aspect of government advice – social distancing.

To minimise the spread of coronavirus, the government advises us to stay at home. It says we should only go out to shop for essentials, for health reasons, for daily exercise and to go to work only if the work cannot be done at home. When we go out, the government has told us to practice social distancing, maintaining a minimum distance between ourselves and others. This, of course, requires some expression of distance measurement, and we are told to remain 2 metres apart. It seems that the vast majority of the people have been observing social distancing and most seem to understand how far is meant by 2 metres.

The coronavirus section of the official NHS website contains a few references to social distancing. On the 'Advice for Everyone' page, it says "These reasons are exceptions – even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent outside of the home and ensuring you are 2 metres apart from anyone outside of your household." On the 'Self Isolation Advice' page, it says "If you have to stay at home together, try to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from each other.", converting to metres to typical human steps.

Contrast the exclusive use of metric units in official government advice about social distancing and on numerous private notices with muddled thinking elsewhere about how distances should be expressed to members of the public:

- On vehicle dimension signs, metres must be shown alongside feet and inches.
- Official road distance signs must be expressed in yards and miles only.
- Private and commercial property sizes and rooms are mostly expressed in square feet with only occasional conversions to square metres.
- Shopping catalogues show most product dimensions in metres, centimetres and/or millimetres but follow imperial conventions for certain products (e.g. inches for screen and television sizes).
- People's height in police descriptions and in media articles are given only in feet and inches.
- Marathon distances are expressed sometimes in kilometres and sometimes in miles.
- Long distances are expressed by the general media almost exclusively in miles.
- Wind speeds are expressed in miles per hour in weather reports.
- Some sports (e.g. football) use yards while other sports (e.g. swimming, running) use metres.
- Fuel economy measures for cars use both litres per 100 kilometres and miles per gallon.
- Emission levels use grams per kilometre exclusively.
- Footpath signs around the UK are sometimes in kilometres only, miles only or in both miles and km.
- Commercial road atlases use both miles and kilometres.
- Most gym equipment uses metric units only; kilometres for distances and kilometres per hour for speeds.
- Speedometers in cars sold in the UK show both miles and kilometres.
- Visibility levels in weather reports are expressed in metres for short distances and kilometres for long distances.

These are some examples of the measurement muddle in the use of distances and areas alone and this is not an exhaustive list. This muddle extends to other types of units where we continue to see two competing systems in use.

The government has surely noticed that its advice to keep 2 metres apart in its social distancing measures has been well understood. I have not heard anyone asking how long two metres is or for any imperial conversions. So why do we continue to see such a muddle of exclusive use of imperial units, exclusive use of metric units and a combination of both? This even extends to official use of measurements. Is it not time for the government to standardise on the use of metric units for all official, legal, administrative and trade purposes across the UK?