



KING ETHELRED'S COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Established in 978 (ish)

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE, ENERGY
AND RETROSPECTIVE SAFETY ENGINEERING

DRUNK IN CHARGE OF A STEAM ENGINE

Being a retrospective safety assessment of the strange laws of England and Wales, of the stranger laws that were never laws at all, and of the Crown Dependencies; with a review of the College's twelve regulations, none of which could be repealed



A departmental research thesis prepared under the College Fellowship Ordinance
(Regulations, the Keeping Thereof, and the Reasons for Them) 1588

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*Fortitudine.
Ingenio.
Tea and biscuits.*



ABSTRACT

In June 2025 a history website published a list of the most bizarre laws in British history, and in October 2026 the Bursar read it.[1] He reported at breakfast that it is illegal to handle a salmon suspiciously, to enter Parliament in armour, to be drunk in charge of a cow, to beat a carpet in the street and to gamble in a library, and asked whether the College was exposed. The Proctor, who keeps the College's twelve regulations, saw an opportunity, and the Department of Fire, Energy and Retrospective Safety Engineering was asked to examine the nation's strange laws as it would examine any safety measure: what is the hazard, when was the control put in, and is it still needed.

The Department read every law it could at the source, in the statute book itself, and found that the list was about half right. The salmon law is real, and has since been extended to eels. The armour is real and in force. The cow is cattle. The carpet is in a different Act. The library gambling was repealed in 2007. The most famous laws of all, against dying in Parliament or for shooting Welshmen in Chester, are not laws and never were.[2] The Department also went to the Crown Dependencies, where it found a remedy that requires kneeling and the Lord's Prayer in French, an island that was feudal until 2008, and a parliament one year younger than the College.

The principal finding is that the strange laws which exist are not strange. Each is a control measure put in after an accident, by people who had seen the accident; the strangeness is the reader's, who has not. The laws that are genuinely absurd do not exist. The College's twelve regulations were reviewed by the same method, and none of them could be repealed either.

Research status. Every law quoted is quoted from its text on legislation.gov.uk, read on 13 October 2026, or from the sources referenced; where a popular list and the statute disagree, the paper follows the statute and says so. The myths are identified as myths on the authority of the sources cited. The College, its Department, its twelve regulations and their reasons, the Proctor's review and every finding are fiction. Nothing in this paper is legal advice, and the Department would like that understood by anyone carrying a ladder.

Keywords: statute law, Metropolitan Police Act 1839, Town Police Clauses Act 1847, Licensing Act 1872, Salmon Act 1986, legal myths, Clameur de Haro, Sark, Tynwald, retrospective safety.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department thanks the Bursar, who read the list, and the Proctor, who acted on it. It thanks Miss Honoria Catchpole of the Æthelred Library of Useful Numbers for a ruling on betting in the Library, which is now lawful and remains unavailable.

Mr Arthur Stobbs, Clerk of Works, assessed the footway offences as an employer of men with ladders. Major (Retd.) Alistair MacTavish assessed the Licensing Act as a man who has been in charge of things. Mrs Enid Partridge assessed it as the keeper of the urn, which is not a steam engine, and has asked that this be minuted. It has been.

Statement on nomenclature. 'In force' means shown in force on legislation.gov.uk on 13 October 2026. 'England and Wales' is used because most of these laws extend there and no further; Scotland has its own laws, and they are not strange in the same way. 'The Crown Dependencies' are Jersey, Guernsey (with Sark) and the Isle of Man, which are not part of the United Kingdom and have asked the College, again, to say so. It has.

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NOMENCLATURE

Symbol	Meaning
Carriage	In the Licensing Act 1872: a vehicle. Held to include a mobility scooter; a bicycle now has a law of its own
Cattle	What the Licensing Act 1872 says. Popular lists say cow. The cow is included; so is the rest of the herd
Clameur de Haro	A Norman remedy still in force in Jersey and Guernsey. Requires two witnesses, the knees and French
Control measure	An action taken to reduce a hazard. In this paper, usually a statute; in the College, a regulation
Footway	The pavement. Where, in London since 1839, the casks, ladders and planks may not go
In force	Shown in force on legislation.gov.uk on 13 October 2026
Level 1, 3	Points on the standard scale of fines. Level 1 is £200 [9]; the others are larger
Myth	A law widely reported and never enacted. Dying in Parliament is the type specimen
Promulgation	In the Isle of Man, the reading of a new Act on Tynwald Hill. Without it the Act lapses
Retrospective safety	Safety measures introduced after the event. The Department's subject, since 1667
The Form	The College risk-assessment form of 1979. Used for everything since, including this paper
The regulations	The College's twelve, published with its term dates. Each has a reason; most are not discussed

1 THE LIST

1.1 Breakfast

The list was published on 20 June 2025 by a website of British history, under the title 'The most bizarre laws in British history'. It begins with salmon, proceeds through compulsory archery, planks of wood and witches, and ends with the observation that it is illegal to be drunk in a pub.[1] The Bursar read it on a Tuesday in October 2026, over the kedgeriee, and stopped at the salmon. He asked whether the College had ever handled a salmon in suspicious circumstances; the Senior Common Room said that it had not, and Mrs Partridge said that it depended what was meant by the kedgeriee.

The Proctor, who keeps the College's twelve regulations, saw his opportunity. The regulations are published with the term dates under the heading 'Twelve regulations, each with a reason the College would rather not go into', and the Proctor has wanted for some years to know what the reasons were. He proposed that the nation's strange laws be assessed first, by the Department of Fire, Energy and Retrospective Safety Engineering, which was founded in 1667 after a fire in London had made several points forcefully, and that the College's own regulations then be assessed by the same method. The Bursar agreed, on the understanding that nothing would be repealed that had cost money to put in.

1.2 Method

The Department treats a law as a control measure. Every control has a hazard behind it, and most were put in after the hazard had shown what it could do: that is what the Department means by retrospective safety, and it is how most safety is made. The method is the College risk-assessment form of 1979, which is used for everything, and which asks of each control three questions: what is the hazard, when was the control put in, and is it still needed.

The Department read every law at its source, the text on legislation.gov.uk, which shows what is still in force. This turned out to matter. Of the five laws the Bursar reported at breakfast, one was exactly right, one was right and had grown, one had the wrong animal, one was in the wrong Act, and one had been repealed in 2007. For the Proctor's review the Department borrowed the six grounds on which Parliament's own revisers have long declared a law dead: expired, spent, repealed in general terms, virtually repealed, superseded, and obsolete.[14] A regulation that met none of the six would be retained.

Departmental finding 1. The list is a list of control measures with the hazards removed. The Department will put the hazards back. *The regulations:* The Proctor has placed all twelve College regulations under review, and has been asked by the Senior Common Room whether the review is itself a regulation. He has said it is not, yet.

2 THE LAWS THAT ARE NOT

2.1 Dying in Parliament

The most famous strange law in Britain does not exist. In November 2007 a television channel asked nearly four thousand people to choose the most ludicrous law from a shortlist. Twenty-seven per cent chose the law against dying in the Houses of Parliament, and seven per cent the law that makes it treason to put a stamp on upside down.[3] Neither is in the statute book.[2,18] The Department, which has a professional interest in what happens in buildings, notes that the public was asked to rank the absurdity of laws and chose the one that is not a law, which it regards as the public getting the right answer by the wrong method.

The others in the family are no better. There is no right to shoot a Welshman in Chester or a Scotsman in York, with a longbow or otherwise; the College is entirely at liberty to eat mince pies on Christmas Day; and a letter may be stamped upside down without treason.[2] Most have a grain of truth somewhere: in 1403, during the Glyndŵr rising, Welshmen breaking curfew in Chester risked execution, though nobody else was allowed to carry it out; and Christmas was indeed suppressed during the Interregnum, which ended in 1660.[2] Professor Sir Peregrine Fortescue, asked whether a law that permitted the shooting of one nation's citizens in another's city could pass his rule, that a place belongs to the people who live in it, said that it could not pass anything, and that this was the point of it.

2.2 Berwick and Russia

The longest war in the College's survey never began. The story is that Berwick-upon-Tweed, having changed hands between England and Scotland so often that it was named separately in proclamations, was named in the declaration of the Crimean War and left out of the peace, and so remained at war with Russia for over a century. In 1966, the story goes on, the London correspondent of Pravda visited the Mayor of Berwick, and the two made a mutual declaration of peace; the Mayor said that the Russian people could sleep peacefully in their beds. The visit happened. The war did not: Berwick was mentioned in neither the declaration of war nor the treaty.[4] Major MacTavish, told that a town had been at war with Russia for over a century without noticing, said that this was the best-conducted war he had heard of.

Carlisle's contribution is not a law but a curse. In 1525 the Archbishop of Glasgow, Gavin Dunbar, cursed the Border Reivers in 1,069 words, beginning with their heads and the hairs of their heads and working downwards.[5] The Department notes that it is longer than most of the statutes in this paper, has never been repealed, and was not, so far as it can find, ever enforced, which makes it the only document in the survey that is exactly what the public thinks a law is.

Departmental finding 2. The most famous strange laws are not laws. The real strange laws, which follow, are less famous because they are less strange. *The regulations:* Regulation 8, that every conclusion is to be tested by applying it to the person who reached it, is retained. It is the regulation that catches myths, and it was applied to this finding, which survived.

3 THE FOOTWAY

3.1 The hazard register of 1839

Section 54 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 is still in force, and the Department regards it as the finest hazard register of the Victorian age. Within the Metropolitan Police District it makes it an offence, in any thoroughfare or public place, among other things, to roll or carry any cask, tub, hoop or wheel, or any ladder, plank, pole, showboard or placard, upon any footway, except to load or unload a cart or to cross the footway; to disturb an inhabitant by ringing any door-bell or knocking at any door without lawful excuse; and to fly any kite to the annoyance of the inhabitants, or to make or use any slide upon ice or snow in any street, to the common danger of the passengers.[6] Figure 3.1 sorts its seventeen numbered offences by hazard.

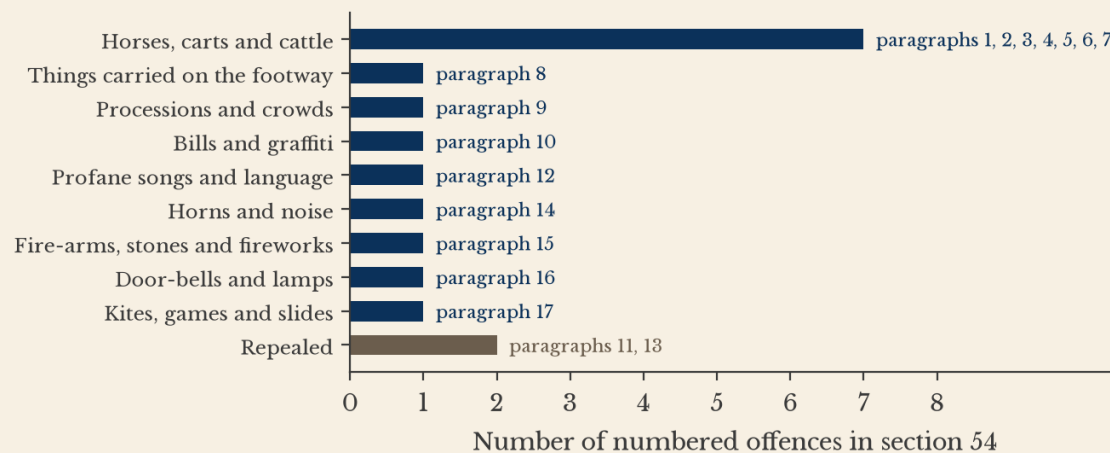


Figure 3.1: The hazard register of 1839. The seventeen numbered offences of section 54 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839, sorted by the hazard each controls; two have been repealed. The Department's classification of the statute's text. Reference 6.

Read as a register, the list stops being funny and becomes a description of a street. Horses, carts and cattle take seven of the seventeen entries, because they were the traffic. The ladder and the plank are there because a man turning round with a plank on a crowded footway takes out the man behind him, which the Department has reproduced, at some cost, in the cloister. The kite is there because it was annoying the inhabitants, and the slide on ice because somebody fell over on it; the Department has not traced the first person to break a wrist on a slide made by a small boy in a London street, but is confident that he existed and that he wrote to his Member.

3.2 The carpet

The carpet is not in the London Act. It is in the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, which repeats much of the 1839 list for the streets of the towns and adds to it. It is an offence there, to the obstruction, annoyance or danger of the residents or passengers, to beat or shake 'any carpet, rug, or mat (except door mats, beaten or shaken before the hour of eight in the morning)', for a fine at level 3 or up to fourteen days in prison.[7] The popular version, that rugs may not be shaken after eight, has the rule the wrong way round: the carpet and the rug may not be beaten in the street at any hour, and only the door mat has a window, which closes at eight.

Mr Stobbs, as an employer of men with ladders, said that he has no objection to the footway rule, which he has enforced on his own staff since a stepladder and a Visiting Fellow met in the cloister in 1987, and that the College has no carpets in the street because Estates does not let them out. He has asked that the door-mat window be noted by the Porters' Lodge, which beats its mat at six.



Figure 3.2: A London footway in 1839, with every hazard in section 54 present at once: a plank, a cask, a kite, a slide and a boy at a door-bell, and a constable deciding where to start. The Department's reconstruction.

Departmental finding 3. The footway offences are a hazard register and a good one. Every entry is a control, and every control had a casualty first. *The regulations:* Regulation 5, that nobody shall walk, dig, build or hold a trial on the Fellows' Lawn without the Clerk of Works, is retained, on the ground that its hazard is on the record: the Lawn was dug in 1643 and took until 1911 to get level. Mr Stobbs regards it as the College's Metropolitan Police Act.

4 THE DRINK

4.1 Section 12

Section 12 of the Licensing Act 1872 is in force in England and Wales and does two things. It makes it an offence to be found drunk in any highway or other public place, 'whether a building or not, or on any licensed premises', which is the law the list described as being drunk in a pub. And it makes it an offence to be drunk while in charge, on any highway or other public place, 'of any carriage, horse, cattle, or steam engine', or to be drunk 'when in possession of any loaded firearms'.^[8] The list said cow. The statute says cattle, so that the cow is covered, and so is the bull, and so, the Department notes, is the herd.

The penalty for being drunk in charge is a fine at level 1, £200, or imprisonment for up to a month.^[8,9] An amendment of 2003 is listed on the statute book among the changes yet to be applied to the section, twenty-three years later.^[8] 'Carriage' has been held to include a mobility scooter; a bicycle now has an offence of its own.^[9] The Department has asked its Professor of Large Numbers to estimate the number of people drunk in charge of a steam engine on a public highway in England in 2026. His written answer read, in full: 'Some.'

4.2 The assessment

Major MacTavish assessed the section as a man who has been in charge of most of the things in it. He regards the firearms clause as the best-drafted sentence in the Victorian statute book, and the horse clause as the most necessary, the horse being the only vehicle in the list with views of its own. He did not regard a steam engine as a hazard, a steam engine being, in his experience, the most reliable thing in any yard. He regarded the man in charge of it as the hazard, and observed that this is the whole of section 12 in one sentence.

Mrs Partridge asked whether the urn was a steam engine, and was told by the Department that it was not, a steam engine being an engine. She asked that this be minuted, in case anybody had views, and it has been. The Vice-Chancellor, who taps the principal boiler with a silver spanner at the Annual Inspection of the Boilers each Michaelmas, has asked whether the boiler is a steam engine. It is not either. He has asked that the Inspection be held, as it always has been, before lunch.

Departmental finding 4. Section 12 is a control on the man, not the machine, which is why it has outlived the machines. It names the steam engine because in 1872 that was the thing most likely to kill somebody if its driver had been at the cider. *The regulations:* Regulation 3, that tea is served at the one-hour mark of every examination, is retained. The Proctor has established the reason: in 1951 an examination was set without it, and the Department of Fire, Energy and Retrospective Safety Engineering was, by the third hour, a fire risk.

5 THE FISH

5.1 Section 32

The salmon is real. Section 32 of the Salmon Act 1986, which extends to England, Wales and Scotland, makes it an offence for a person to receive a fish, or to help retain, remove or dispose of it, at a time when he believes, or it would be reasonable for him to suspect, that a relevant offence has at any time been committed in relation to it; a relevant offence being, in short, that somebody took, killed, landed or sold the fish unlawfully.[10] It is the law against handling stolen goods, for fish. The suspicious circumstances are the fish's, not the handler's: a man may hold a salmon in any manner he likes, provided its past is clean.

The list has the law smaller than it is. Since 12 January 2010 the section has applied not only to salmon but to 'salmon, trout, eels, lampreys, smelt and freshwater fish', and its heading now speaks of handling fish in suspicious circumstances.[10] In an age that has repealed the gambling in its libraries, the law on suspicious fish has grown. The list also says that the offence carries up to two years in prison.[1] The statute as it stands provides for a fine.[10] And it contains, in subsection (3), a defence the Department admires as a piece of drafting: that no relevant offence had in fact been committed in relation to the fish in question. The accused may, in other words, prove the fish innocent.

5.2 The kedgeriee

The Bursar's question at breakfast was answered by Mrs Partridge, who confirmed that the Senior Common Room's kedgeriee is made with smoked haddock, which is a sea fish and not on the list, and that the College has never had a salmon whose past it could not account for. The Bursar asked whether the College had ever had a salmon at all, and was told that it had, once, and that it was the reason for one of the regulations.

Departmental finding 5. The salmon law is a control on a market, not on a fish: it exists because poached fish were being sold, and it has grown because poached eels were too. It is the only law in the survey that has got bigger. *The regulations:* Regulation 6, that students shall not climb the wind-tunnel intake, feed the Fellows, or ask the Thermodynamics Department whether entropy is 'just vibes', is retained. The Proctor has established the reason for its second clause: in 1953 a salmon was passed to a Fellow through the window of the Senior Common Room by a student who declined to say where it had come from. The circumstances are minuted as suspicious.

6 ARMOUR AND ARROWS

6.1 1313

The oldest law in the survey is in force. A Statute forbidding Bearing of Armour, of 1313, records that it was agreed that in all Parliaments and other assemblies in the realm of England 'every Man shall come without all Force and Armour, well and peaceably', and that the King might punish those who did otherwise; it was given at Westminster on 30 October, and legislation.gov.uk shows it in force in England and Wales.[11] It is seven hundred and thirteen years old, and the Department regards it as the clearest control in the survey: the hazard was barons arriving at Parliament dressed for a disagreement, and the control was to ask them not to.

The Trebuchet Research Group asked at once whether it might take the Trebuchet to Parliament, a trebuchet not being armour. The Department replied that the statute forbids Force as well as Armour, and that a trebuchet is Force in its purest form. The Group has asked whether a trebuchet might attend a Parliament if it were not loaded, and has been referred to the Clerk of Works, who has referred it to 1313.

6.2 1541

The Unlawful Games Act 1541 was passed against 'Several new devised Games' which had caused 'the Decay of Archery', and required that all men under the age of sixty 'shall have Bows and Arrows for shooting'; boys between seven and seventeen were to have a bow and two shafts, and a man over seventeen a bow and four arrows, on a penalty of six shillings and eightpence.[12] It was finally repealed by the Betting and Gaming Act 1960, with effect from 1 May 1961.[12] The list says that it lasted until 1960 because National Service ended then.[1] The Department can find that both ended at about that time, and nothing to show that either knew about the other. Professor Widdowson-Bligh, shown the two dates together, said: 'It is a year.'

Major MacTavish regards the Act of 1541 as the finest piece of defence legislation in English history, being the only one that required every man to keep his weapon and practise with it, and would like it restored, with the bow replaced by an L1A1 and the six and eightpence by a brew. He was told that the Act had been repealed by a gambling statute, and said that this explained a great deal about 1961.

Departmental finding 6. The armour law is in force because its hazard, men arriving at a parliament armed, has never quite gone away. The archery law is repealed because its hazard, a realm without archers, did go away, and was replaced by another. *The regulations:* Regulation 7, that trebuchets are to be pointed away from the Library, is retained. It was added in Michaelmas 2026, and its reason is catalogued; Miss Catchpole has confirmed that the reason is the Library.

7 THE LIBRARY

The Libraries Offences Act 1898 is in force in England and Wales. In any library or reading-room to which it applies, and to the annoyance or disturbance of any person using it, a person commits an offence who behaves in a disorderly manner, or uses violent, abusive or obscene language, or who, after proper warning, persists in remaining beyond the closing hour; the penalty is a fine at level 1.[13] The list says that it is illegal to gamble in a library.[1] It was. The third paragraph of the section, against a person who 'bets or gambles', was repealed on 1 September 2007 by the Gambling Act 2005.[13] Since that date a person may bet in a public library, provided he does it quietly, does not swear when he loses, and goes home at closing.

Miss Catchpole was asked whether the Æthelred Library of Useful Numbers would now take bets. She replied that the Library is not a bookmaker, a position she has held since she was first offered odds on the end of the world, and that the Library in any case holds both sides of every wager, which makes it impossible to lose and pointless to play. The Sub-Librarian, who enforces silence and has not spoken since his appointment, is the only member of the College who cannot commit the second offence, and is understood to regard this as the purpose of his career.

Departmental finding 7. The Libraries Offences Act controls three hazards: the disorderly reader, the swearing reader, and the reader who will not go home. The fourth, the betting reader, was found in 2007 to be no longer a hazard, or to have moved online. *The regulations:* Regulation 10, that anything left in the Library at closing becomes part of the collection, is retained. The Proctor has established the reason: in 1898, the year of the Act, a Visiting Fellow persisted in remaining beyond the closing hour, after proper warning, and was catalogued. He was released at the Michaelmas audit, under Donations.

8 THE CROWN DEPENDENCIES

The Crown Dependencies are not part of the United Kingdom, have laws of their own, and have kept some of the oldest. The Department visited three of them from the record, and found that they had kept the strangest laws in the survey and used them more than England uses any of its own.

8.1 Haro

The Clameur de Haro is an injunction of restraint that survives as enforceable law in Jersey and Guernsey. A person who believes he is being wronged, at that moment and in that place, kneels before at least two witnesses in the presence of the wrongdoer, raises a hand, and cries 'Haro! Haro! Haro! À l'aide, mon Prince, on me fait tort', which is to say, come to my aid, my Prince, someone does me wrong; he then says the Lord's Prayer in French, and in Guernsey a grace as well, and must lodge the complaint in writing within twenty-four hours. The wrongdoer must stop until a court has decided; if he does not, he is fined, whoever turns out to be right, and if the clameur was raised without cause, the criant pays instead.[15] It was raised in 1087 by a landowner who objected to William the Conqueror being buried in a church built on land seized from his family.[15] The Department notes that the College's paper on 1066 has therefore a sequel, in which a Norman is stopped by a man on his knees.

It is used. In December 2016 it was raised in Guernsey to prevent the forcible removal of a derelict Kia Sportage from private land. In 2023 a woman in Jersey raised it to stop a parish worker trimming trees over a road through her property; the Royal Court found that it had been raised incorrectly, fined her £1,000, and the parish's legal costs were estimated at £70,000.[15] The Bursar, told this, asked whether the College could raise the clameur against the Treasury, and was told that the College is in England, that the Treasury is not on his land, and that his French is not good enough. He has asked for lessons.



Figure 8.1: The Clameur de Haro, raised in a Guernsey lane against a council van and a derelict car, with two witnesses and the van stopped. The Department's reconstruction.

8.2 Sark

Sark was a royal fief until 2008. In 1565 Elizabeth I granted the island to Helier de Carteret, Seigneur of St Ouen in Jersey, in perpetuity, on condition that he kept it free of pirates and occupied by at least forty men; until 2008 its parliament, Chief Pleas, consisted of the Seigneur, the Seneschal, the holders of the forty tenements and twelve elected deputies. The Privy Council approved a reformed, elected chamber on 9 April 2008, and Europe lost its last feudal state.[16] Cars are banned from Sark's roads; tractors, bicycles and horse-drawn vehicles are allowed.[16] The Department notes that the Licensing Act 1872 would find more to do on Sark than anywhere in England.

In August 1990 a French physicist who believed himself the rightful Seigneur arrived on Sark with a semi-automatic weapon, put up two posters announcing that he would take over the island

at noon the next day, and the next morning patrolled in front of the manor in battle dress. While he sat on a bench waiting for noon, the island's volunteer constable approached him and complimented him on his weapon; the visitor changed the magazine to show how it worked, and the constable tackled and arrested him. He served seven days in Guernsey.[16] Major MacTavish regards this as the finest piece of policing in the survey, on the ground that no soldier has ever been able to resist explaining his kit, and has added it to DE204 as an example of the perimeter that defends itself by asking questions.

8.3 Tynwald

Once a year, on Tynwald Day, the Isle of Man's legislature, Tynwald, leaves its usual meeting place in Douglas and meets at St John's, partly in the Royal Chapel and partly in the open air on Tynwald Hill, a small artificial mound. Every Act that has received Royal Assent is promulgated there, and an Act of Tynwald which is not so promulgated within eighteen months of passage ceases to have effect.[17] The Department regards this as the best control in the survey: a law that lapses unless somebody is prepared to stand on a hill and read it out cannot become obsolete without anyone noticing.

Tynwald Day is 5 July, and has been since a calendar Act of 1753 kept the old festival on the same 'natural days' when the island moved from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar; it was never moved again, although the two calendars have since drifted two days further apart.[17] In 1979 Tynwald celebrated its millennium as the world's oldest continuous parliament.[17] The Bursar has noted that this makes Tynwald 979 and the College 978 (ish), and has written to Douglas offering the island the benefit of the College's experience, which he describes as one year longer. Tynwald has not replied, and is not obliged to until it has read the letter out on a hill.



Figure 8.2: Tynwald Day at St John's: an Act read out on Tynwald Hill, so that it does not lapse, and a College observer at the foot of the mound with a notebook and a deadline of eighteen months. The Department's reconstruction.

Departmental finding 8. The Crown Dependencies keep their strange laws because they use them. A law that requires kneeling, or a hill, is never forgotten, because somebody has to do it. *The regulations:* Regulation 12, that the Senior Common Room's biscuit tins are not structural members and are not to be used as such again, is retained. Its reason is known to Mrs Partridge, who does not discuss it, and the Proctor has decided not to raise a clameur.

9 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The laws

The Bursar's list was half right, and its errors all ran the same way: towards the absurd. The salmon law is real and has grown; the armour law is real and in force; the cow is cattle; the carpet is in another Act and has the hour the wrong way round; the library gambling has been repealed; the archery was not repealed because of National Service. The famous laws, on dying in Parliament and shooting Welshmen, are not laws at all. Figure 9.1 sets the survey's laws by age.

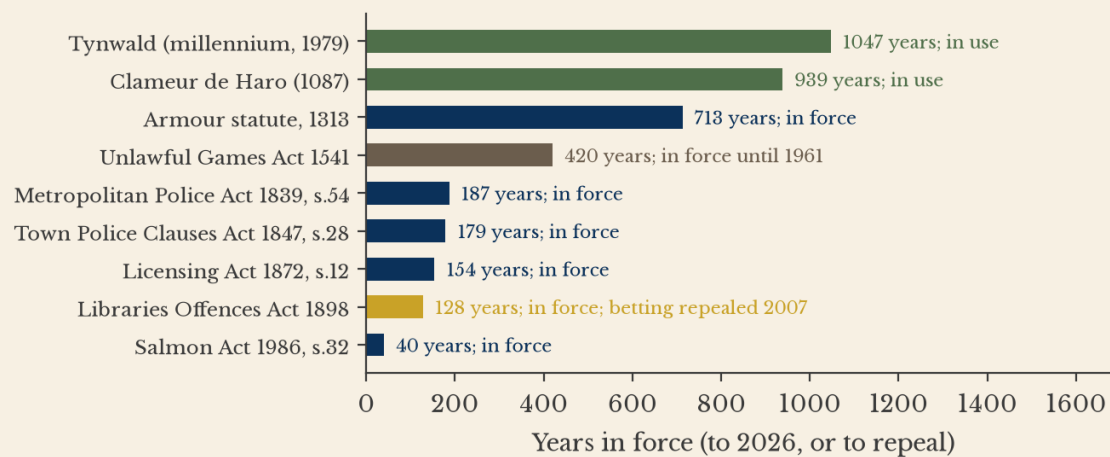


Figure 9.1: The survey's laws by years in force, to 2026 or to repeal, and what became of them. The years are the statutes' own; the Clameur de Haro is dated from 1087 and Tynwald from its millennium. References 6 to 8, 10 to 13, 15 to 17.

Read as control measures, the real laws are not strange. Each names a hazard that had already done its damage, in the words of the people who saw it: the plank on the footway, the slide on the ice, the man drunk in charge of the steam engine, the poached eel, the baron in armour. The strangeness is the reader's, who has not seen the accident. The laws that really are absurd, the ones about dying and Welshmen and mince pies, are absurd because nobody ever wrote them, and so nobody ever had to have a reason.

9.2 The regulations

The Proctor's review of the College's twelve regulations is set out in Appendix B. None was expired, spent, repealed in general terms, virtually repealed, superseded or obsolete, and none was repealed. Five reasons are now on the record, and seven remain in the category the College would rather not go into. The Proctor has declared the review a success, on the ground that he set out to learn the reasons for twelve regulations and now knows five more than he did, and has asked that the review itself be added as a thirteenth. The Bursar has objected that a thirteenth regulation would cost money to put in.

Principal finding. The strange laws that exist are control measures written after an accident by people who had seen it, and they are strange only to people who have not. The absurd laws do not exist. The College's regulations are the same: each has a reason, and the reason is generally an accident; none can be repealed, and in the Isle of Man every one of them would by now have had to be read out on a hill.

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APPENDIX A - SAMPLE CALCULATIONS

A.1 Ages in 2026

Armour, 1313: 713 years. Metropolitan Police Act, 1839: 187. Town Police Clauses Act, 1847: 179. Licensing Act, 1872: 154. Libraries Offences Act, 1898: 128. Salmon Act, 1986: 40; its extension to eels, 2010: 16. The archery Act, 1541 to 1961: 420 years in force. The 2003 change to the Licensing Act, still to be applied: 23 years. The Clameur de Haro, from 1087: 939 years. Tynwald, from 979: 1,047; the College, from 978 (ish): 1,048 (ish).

A.2 The poll

27 per cent of about 3,931 voters = about 1,061 people, who chose as the most ludicrous law in Britain a law that does not exist. 7 per cent = about 275, who chose another.

A.3 The clameur

Jersey, 2023: costs to the parish about £70,000; fine £1,000; ratio 70 to 1.

APPENDIX B - THE PROCTOR'S REVIEW

Each of the College's twelve regulations was tested against the six grounds on which a law may be declared dead: expired, spent, repealed in general terms, virtually repealed, superseded and obsolete. None met any of them. The reasons are the College's; fiction.

No.	Regulation (short form)	Grounds met	Reason
1	Surrender at the examination door	None	Not discussed
2	The ferret was returned	None	Not discussed. It had not assisted
3	Tea at the one-hour mark	None	An examination without it, 1951 (Chapter 4)
4	Answers with units	None	Not discussed
5	Nothing on the Lawn without Estates	None	1643 (Chapter 3)
6	Do not feed the Fellows	None	A salmon, 1953 (Chapter 5)
7	Trebuchets away from the Library	None	The Library (Chapter 6)
8	Test a conclusion on its author	None	Not discussed; applied to this paper
9	Gowns in bed in the Candlemas term	None	Not discussed, and nor is the heating
10	Left in the Library at closing	None	A Visiting Fellow, 1898 (Chapter 7)
11	Ask in the workshop	None	Not discussed in his absence
12	Biscuit tins are not structural	None	Known to Mrs Partridge (Chapter 8)

Table B.1: The College's twelve regulations, reviewed. Grounds from the 1892 note (reference 14); the regulations and their reasons are the College's. Fiction.

APPENDIX C - DEPARTMENTAL NOTE

The Department of Fire, Energy and Retrospective Safety Engineering teaches the BEng in Fire, Energy and Retrospective Safety Engineering (KE14). From Michaelmas 2026 the module FE110 Retrospective Safety will set this question: 'Section 54 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 forbids the carrying of a plank upon a footway. Describe the accident. You may use the College risk-assessment form of 1979, and you may not use the cloister.'

Persevera Etelred