

## CALENDAR DATES

Until 1751 the year number in England and Wales changed not on 1<sup>st</sup> January but on 25<sup>th</sup> March (Lady Day), one of the quarter days. It was only from 1752, by an Act of Parliament, that the year started on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

The previous style is known as the Julian Calendar (after Julius Caesar) and the new style as the Gregorian Calendar (after Pope Gregory XIII).

The Julian Calendar was based on exactly 365¼ days and had a leap year every four years. This was not quite right and over the years it drifted away from astronomical time. The Gregorian Calendar was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, at which time a correction of 10 days was needed. 5<sup>th</sup> October 1582 was therefore followed by 15<sup>th</sup> October 1582. It was decreed that centuries not divisible by 4 (1600, 2000 etc) would not be leap years, so that the calendar would remain in step with astronomical time. England largely ignored the new style calendar until 1752, by which time the old calendar was 11 days out. To compensate and bring the country into line with most of the rest of Europe, including Scotland, it was decreed that 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1752 was to be followed by 14<sup>th</sup> September 1752. The new calendar was still not precise enough, however, and in the event 2000 was declared to be a leap year. Russia, the Balkan States and Greece continued with the Julian calendar until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Until the change, parish registers and other documents used the Julian Calendar, although some did use dual notation (see example overleaf). This means that entries for years up to 1750 would cover dates from 25<sup>th</sup> March to the following 24<sup>th</sup> March. The year 1751, however, started on 25<sup>th</sup> March but ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December.

Thus:

1749 ran from 25<sup>th</sup> March to the following 24<sup>th</sup> March.

1750 ran from 25<sup>th</sup> March to the following 24<sup>th</sup> March.

1751 ran from 24<sup>th</sup> March to the following 31<sup>st</sup> December. (1<sup>st</sup> January 1751 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1751 did not exist.)

1752 ran from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December.

When a date before 1752 is between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 24<sup>th</sup> March, it is sometimes useful to write down both the old and new year, e.g. 17<sup>th</sup> February 1748/49 means the date would have been written as 17<sup>th</sup> February 1748 in a parish register but in the new style would have been 17<sup>th</sup> February 1749.

Dates from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1749 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1749 are the same in both old and new styles.

Dates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1749 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1749 in the old style can be written as 1749/50.

Dates from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1750 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1750 are the same in both old and new styles.

Dates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1750 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1750 in the old style can be written as 1750/51.

Dates from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1751 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1751 are the same in both old and new styles.

Dates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1751 to 24<sup>th</sup> March 1751 did not exist.

Dates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1752 are in the new style.

One can never be sure (unless stated) whether a transcript is of the original dates as recorded or whether the dates have been adapted to the new style. If necessary, the register should be checked. In many cases it will not matter, apart from strict accuracy, but sometimes it may be the only way of sorting out possible ancestors if several of the same name are on the short-list.

Care therefore has to be taken when using parish register transcriptions. For example, a child born on, say, "1 April 1731" could not be the sibling of one born on, say, "1 March 1730", which was only one month earlier, not thirteen. On the other hand, children baptised on 24 March 1749 and 1 April 1749 could be siblings, as these dates are not 8 days but almost a year apart. The ages of people born before the change and dying after the change have to be calculated carefully.

Note that the National Burial Index (NBI) gives dates converted to the new style, so care is needed when using them. It is necessary to convert them back to old style in order to check an entry in a parish register. This only applies to dates between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 24<sup>th</sup> March. For example, an NBI record of a burial on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1703 would appear as 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1702 in the register. IGI records may or may not have been converted.

Quarter days were the dates on which many payments were due and accounts settled. 25<sup>th</sup> March 1752 (new style) fell exactly one year after Lady Day (25<sup>th</sup> March) 1751 (old style) but because 11 days were taken out of September 1752, the next full year of 365 days was not complete until 4<sup>th</sup> April 1753. The tax and fiscal year has accordingly begun on 5 April ever since.

Example of dual notation

Alice Swan of Kettleshulme, Cheshire, made a will dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1732/33. She was buried on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1732 (shown in the NBI, of course, as 26<sup>th</sup> January 1733). An inventory of her possessions was dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1732. Probate was granted on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1733, which was in fact four months after she died.

Whereof I the said Alice Swan to this, my last will  
& testament set my hand and Seal the 20 day of January  
in the year 1732) ---  
Signed sealed & published in witness  
of us the said  
John Nichford  
Robert Hornmore  
Berkin Rowett

Alice Swan  
and Seal