



The Calendar (New Style) Act of 1750

(or why nothing happened between 1 January 1751 to 24 March 1751 and from 3 September 1752 to 13 September 1752)

Most genealogists know that Britain moved from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian Calendar in 1751 (or was it 1752 ?) and we sometimes have problems deciding in which year our ancestors were baptised or buried.

The Julian Calendar was introduced by Julius Caesar in 45BC and assumed that a year was 365 and one quarter days long. But this was not accurate. It was 11 minutes too long!

Over the centuries these 11 minutes added up, and in 1582 the Gregorian Calendar was introduced which omitted 11 days in 1582 to correct the error and also made new rules for calculating leap years by saying that centennial years (1600, 1700, 1800 etc) were no longer leap years unless they were divisible by 400. This removed 3 leap years every 400 years and corrected most of the Julian Calendar error.

Most of Europe adopted the new Calendar fairly quickly but Britain did not and this caused some confusion especially with international contracts and legal matters. Between 1582 and 1752, some English and colonial records included both the "Old Style" and "New Style" year, and the system was known as "**double dating**", and was shown as 20 February 1702/3, or 1702(3).

Parliament waited until 1750 before changing the law and passed the Calendar Act which removed 11 days from 3 to 13 September 1752. Thus the day following Wednesday 2 September 1752 was Thursday 14 September 1752.

By 1600, most of Europe, including Scotland, had adopted 1 January as the beginning of the year but England and Wales kept the start of the year as 25 March. The Calendar Act changed that - so that the whole of Britain (and her colonies) would be in line with most other countries. The Act said that the year 1751 which began on 25 March 1751 would end on 31 December 1751. Normally the year 1751 would have ended on 24 March 1751 with the next day being 25 March 1752. The Act changed this so there was never a period of 1 January 1751 to 24 March 1751. These 84 days still happened but they were now in 1752.

So the year 1751 did not consist of 365 days but only 281 days (365 – 84) and 1752 (a leap year) consisted of 355 days (366 – 11).

The Bill to change the law was introduced into Parliament on 25 February 1750/1. It was passed by the Commons on 13 May 1751 and the Act received royal assent on 27 May 1751. The Act also contains a list showing how to calculate Easter Day each year up to the year 2199 !

If you have a parish register research block, aka. Brick wall during this period, then this may be the reason ?

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