

Calendars

By David M. Barker

Many take for granted the Christian Calendar. They are not aware that most of the ancients did not use a fixed date as a reference over many generations. With each new king their date-reckoning started over. Converting these relative dates to the modern calendar is a challenging process.

The Gregorian calendar (named for Pope Gregory the XIII) was introduced to replace the old Roman calendar (the Julian, named after Julius Caesar). It was adopted in four countries in 1582, and Pope Gregory decreed that the day after Oct. 4th of that year became Oct. 15th to correct for the 10 days of accumulated error as a result of the lack of precision of the Julian calendar. The Gregorian also re-instituted the Roman practice of having the new-year start on January 1. In many ancient cultures the new-year began in the springtime. In England and its colonies, this was the case until the Gregorian calendar was adopted in 1752, when the day after September 3rd became September 14th. Prior to 1752, New Year's Day in the British Empire was March 25th.

While researching family genealogy, I was surprised to learn of this change. An example is found in the Parish Registers of Diss, Norfolk, England where it shows:

	First Entry In Register	(New Year's Day)	Last Entry in Register	(Last Day of Year)	"Year" Length
1750	March 25	(March 25)	March 24	(March 24)	12 mo.
1751	March 29	(March 25)	Dec. 24	(Dec. 31)	~9 mo.
1752	January 2	(January 1)	Dec. 28	(Dec. 31)	~12 mo.

Some countries phased in the change to the Gregorian calendar, and Russia didn't adopt it until 1918.¹ Thus, calendar confusion has extended into modern times.

Simplified:

	New Year's Day	Last Day of Year	"Year" Length
1750	March 25	March 24	12 mo.
1751	March 25	Dec. 31	~9 mo. (Apr thru Dec + 7 days of March (25 th -31 st))
1752	January 1	Dec. 31	~12 mo. (-11 days (no Sept 4 th -13 th))

Question: In England, which came first, March 24, 1750, or March 25, 1750?

Answer: March 25th. Since it was New Year's day for 1750, and March 24th was the last day of the year.

Question: Is it possible that a child born Dec. 31, 1750 could have had a healthy, full-term little brother born to his parents March 24, 1751?

Answer: Yes, because prior to 1751, the year in England and its colonies started 25 March, and ended 24 March. Thus, March 24, 1751 was 1 year, 2 months, and 24 days after Dec. 31, 1750.

Question: Is it possible for a child to have been Christened on March 24, 1750, and born March 25, 1750?

Answer: Yes, if he was born on New Year's day (March 25, 1750), and Christened one day less than a year later (on the last day of the year, March 24, 1750).

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar.

Question: If you had an ancestor born March 15 1750, how old would he be on April 15, 1750?

Answer: Trick question: he wouldn't have been born yet since the dates after Dec 31, 1750 up to March 24 were still 1750.

Question: What is wrong with the date: 1 March 1751?

Answer: It, would have been three months after Dec. 31, 1751 under the old style, calendar, but became known as 1 March 1752 under the new. Thus you may see it written 1 Mar 1751/2.

Because the year 1751 started on March 25 and ended Dec 31, it was only 9 months and 7 days long. There are no official dates recorded for January 1 to March 24, 1751. Those days (immediately following Dec 31, 1751) would have still been in 1751 under the old calendar, but under the "New Style" they were considered to be in 1752.

Genealogical research in England and its colonies prior to 1752, dates between Dec 31 and the subsequent March 25 should be shown with the stated year first, then the year as though the Gregorian calendar had already been adopted.

For example:

10 Mar 1740/1 The date found in the parish register 10 Mar 1740, but if the new calendar had been in use at the time the date would have been written 10 Mar 1741, thus 10 Mar 1740/1.