

Useful Information

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Dating

Calendar Years

1752 was the first year in England to officially begin on 1 January. Until the Calendar Act of 1752, the year in England began officially on 25 March (Lady Day), and not 1 January (even though this was when New Year's Day was celebrated).

Thus the year number did not change until 25 March, so taking 1558 as an example, the dates ran as follows:

November	1558
December	1558
January	1558
February	1558
March 1 to 24	1558
March 25	1559

So if you see a document dated any time between January and 24 March before 1752, be aware that in modern terms, you need to add a year. In publications you may see this written as January 1750/51, the year as it was known at the time / the year as we know it now. This is also known as OS (Old Style) and NS (New Style).

The Calendar Act 1752 brought about further changes. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII had reformed the calendar, then in use, known as the Julian Calendar (named after Julius Caesar). The Julian Calendar did not correspond exactly to the solar year. The new Gregorian Calendar cut 10 days from the year in adjustment. Other Catholic countries followed and adopted the Gregorian Calendar but England, being Protestant, did not. England therefore remained 10 days ahead of the New Style Calendar. By 1752 England was some 11 days ahead of other European countries. So in 1752 these days had to be cut out of the year to make the adjustment. Therefore Wednesday 2 September 1752 was followed immediately by Thursday 14 September.

In Scotland, 1 January became the official beginning of the year in 1600, the day after 31 December 1599.

Regnal Years

Some documents will be dated not by the calendar year but by the regnal year - how long the ruling monarch had been on the throne.

'1 Elizabeth I' means the first year of the reign of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth I came to the throne on 17 November 1558, so 1 Elizabeth I means some time between 17 November 1558 and 16 November 1559.

Watch out for documents written in the reign of Charles II. Although he came to the throne in May 1660, after the Commonwealth period, he actually calculated his regnal year as beginning on 30 January 1649, the date of the execution of his father Charles I. So documents written in the first year that Charles II was genuinely on the throne would actually be styled 12 Charles II.

For more information about dates (including saints days, regnal years, religious festivals and terms of the law courts) see C.R. Cheney and M. Jones (eds), 'A Handbook of Dates: For Students of British History' (Cambridge University Press, revd 2000).

For more information about searching The Cecil Papers using dates see our Search help section.

Numbers

Arabic numerals were not used in England until the 16th century, and even after then Roman numerals continued to be used.

Most people today are still familiar with the classic Roman numerals. Be aware, however, that you will find them represented in a slightly different way in documents written in English. In particular, the lower case was used. A '1' by itself, or at the end of a number, was usually represented by a 'j'.

Classic	English
I = 1	j = 1
II = 2	ij = 2
IV = 4	iiij = 4 (not usually iv)
V = 5	V = 5
X = 10	X = 10
XL = 40	A smaller numeral in front of a larger numeral indicates subtraction
L = 50	I = 50 (don't get this mixed up with 'i', which means '1'. i's were usually dotted if they were representing numbers).

LX = 60	A larger numeral in front of a smaller numeral is an addition
C = 100	C = 100
D = 500	D = 500
M = 1000	M = 1000

Counting was done in scores (a score = 20), so you will often come across something like this:
 xx
 iij

(20 over 4), which means 4 times 20, or four score, which is 80. Compare this with the modern French word for 80 - quatre-vingts, 'four twenties'.

Ordinal numbers are represented by superscript letters following them, just as today.

xxiiijth = 24th

But note xxijth = 'two and twentieth', that is 22nd.

Money

Money was calculated in pounds, shillings and pence.

One pound = 20 shillings. The pound was represented either by 'li', or £: transcribe both with a £ sign before the amount given. This symbol is actually an elaborate 'L', from the Latin 'libra', meaning pound. Compare the symbol for about a pound in weight, which is represented by 'lb' - it comes from the same.

One shilling = 12 pennies. A shilling was represented by 's', originally short for 'solidos', a Roman coin.

One penny = two halfpennies, or four farthings. A penny was represented by 'd', short for 'denarius', a Roman coin.

One halfpenny = 2 farthings. A halfpenny was represented by 'ob', short for 'obolus', a Roman coin.

One farthing = a quarter of a penny. A farthing was represented by 'qua', short for 'quadrans'.

A 4d coin was called a groat.

There was also an amount of money known as a mark. A mark was not an actual coin, but an amount. It was worth two-thirds of a pound, that is 13s 4d. Half a mark (one-third of a pound) was therefore 6s 8d.

When transcribing documents that mention amounts of money, do not expand the abbreviations such as li, ob, etc. Leave them abbreviated, and remember to transcribe li as '£'. They were never written out in full.

Measurements

Square measurements were given in acres (abbreviated to 'a'), roods ('r') and perches ('p').

40 perches = 1 rood

4 roods = 1 acre

Confusion arises from the fact that a perch is also a measurement of length. A perch, pole and rod are all terms for a measurement of length of approximately 5 metres (5.5 yards). For further information about measurement see Colin Chapman, 'How heavy, how much and how long?: weights, money and other measures used by our ancestors' (Lochin,1995).

Counties

A list of historic English counties and their standard abbreviations

County	Standard abbreviation
Bedfordshire	Beds
Berkshire	Berk or Berks or Barks
Buckinghamshire	Bucks or Buck
Cambridgeshire	Cambs
Cheshire	Ches
Cornwall	Corn
Cumberland	Cumb
Derbyshire	Derb or Derbs
Devon	Dev
Dorset	Dors
Co. Durham	Dur
Essex	Ess
Gloucestershire	Glouc or Gloucs
Hampshire	Hants
Herefordshire	Heref
Hertfordshire	Herts
Huntingdonshire	Hunts
Kent	

Lancashire	Lancs
Leicestershire	Leic or Leics
Lincolnshire	Lincs
Middlesex	Middx
Norfolk	Norf
Northamptonshire	Northants or Nhants
Northumberland	Northumb
Nottinghamshire	Notts
Oxfordshire	Oxon
Rutland	Rut
Shropshire	Shrops/Salop
Somerset	Som
Staffordshire	Staff or Staffs
Suffolk	Suff
Surrey	Surr
Sussex	Suss
Warwickshire	Warw or Warws
Westmorland	Westmor
Wiltshire	Wilts
Worcestershire	Worc or Worcs
Yorkshire	Yorks

When you see these abbreviated as above in documents do not expand but leave as abbreviated

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