

# AN UNEXPECTED EFFECT OF THE CHANGE OF CALENDAR IN 1752

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IN 1752 in the backward country of Great Britain the calendar was eleven days out of phase with the sun. Midsummer Day (for the purpose of this article 22 June) fell on 11 June. That day could be described as 11/22 June. What happened in 1752 was that Britain caught up with the enlightened countries of Europe and adopted the Gregorian calendar which they had been using for two centuries. Consequently, the day after 2 September was 14 September (that is, 2/13 was followed by 3/14 September). The mob, however, feeling that this procedure savoured of black magic rioted and shouted 'Give us back our eleven days'.

You would not expect anyone to change their birthday to allow for the eleven days, but that is exactly what two people did. Lady Susan Fox-Strangways, the 1st Earl of Ilchester's eldest daughter who caused a great scandal in 1764 by running off with an actor, was born on 1 February 1743.<sup>1</sup> However, in the journal which she started writing in 1787 she recorded her birthday as 12 February.<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely that she made a mistake about anything so personal as her birthday. So we may assume, for example, that at the age of nine she was teased about losing eleven days of her life, burst into tears, and was then comforted by the promise of adjusting her birthday by the eleven days.

Lady Susan's case is well established and without it the next case would not have been noticed. Mrs. Pomeroy, whose husband later became the 1st Viscount Harberton, gave birth to a son on 27 November 1749, according to a letter of 28 November [1749]<sup>3</sup> from Lady Ilchester to her husband. But Burke's *Peerage* records the birth of a son to Mrs. Pomeroy on 8 December 1749, just eleven days later. This discrepancy must also be explained by the change of calendar.

Sir Frederic Madden, that energetic Keeper of Manuscripts, in making researches into his family tree found a similar discrepancy in the date of his grandfather's wedding anniversary which he kept on 19 December. He found an entry in the register recording the marriage of James Badden (an error for Madden) on 8 December 1748. In a later addition to his diary for 24 May 1848 Madden notes: 'This date [8th December] is no doubt the *true one*, and the fact of my grandfather having kept the anniversary of his wedding-day on the *19th December* is accounted for by his reckoning in the *eleven days* taken out of the Calendar by the Act of Parliament 24 Geo. II 1751 *between the 2nd and 14th September 1752. F. M.*'

It is surprising enough to find birthdays and anniversaries altered to take account of the change of calendar, but it is even more surprising to find traces of the Julian calendar surviving for two centuries. Ten years or so ago on Midsummer Day the Dean of Ripon happened to go for a stroll in his garden and met his gardener who was planting potatoes. For lack of better conversation-opener, the Dean said, 'I see you're planting potatoes.' 'Aye,' says the gardener, 'Allus plants spuds on Barnaby-bright – Longest day, Shortest night.' The Dean pondered a moment or two, then remarked, 'But we celebrated St. Barnabas' Day the other week in the Cathedral.' 'Ah,' says the gardener, 'Can't help what they do up in t' Cathedral. Allus plants spuds on Barnaby-bright – Longest day, Shortest night.' It was at this point that light dawned upon the Dean. St. Barnabas' Day is 11 June, and in 1752 before the change of calendar Midsummer Day was also 11 June.<sup>4</sup>

1 List of the children of the 1st Earl of Ilchester, with dates of birth, in Add. MS. 51373A, fol. 225.

2 Lady Susan's journal in Add. MS. 51360, e.g. 1814, 1818.

3 Add. MS. 51337, fol. 37. The letter is fairly securely dated to 1749 by two references:

(1) 'Miss Cheeke hopes that Mrs. Ashe is breeding.' Mrs. Ashe, daughter of the 4th Duke of Bolton, was married on 3 February 1749, and her

husband died on 11 August 1750. It is unlikely that anyone would hope that a lady was pregnant after her husband's death.

(2) 'Miss Pomeroy is just 10 months old.' Mrs. Pomeroy was about to give birth in January 1749 (see letter of 10 January [1749] from Lady Ilchester to her husband in Add. MS. 51337), and clearly lost no time in producing the next child.

4 I owe this anecdote to Mr. T. A. J. Burnett.

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