

The Year That "Old Christmas" Was New

©2014 by Howard L. Kaplan

Not too slowly, and with a very free rhythm ($\text{♩} = 172$)



One year Jul-ius Cae-sar (by Plu-tarch's re-port) asked phi-lo-so-phers how to add-ress



Re-form of the ca-len-dar used by the Ro-mans then: some years had day counts much less



Than need-ed to e-qual the span be-tween sol-sti-ces; o-ther year's counts were much more.



He set a fixed length for the year, with an ex-tra day ad-ded one year out of four.



The real year sped by with the earth's re-vo-lu-tion, the Ju-li-an year not so fast,



The er-ror just ten point nine mi-nutes per year, but in sum, as each cen-tu-ry passed,



Three fourths of a day would be lost as the ca-len-dar failed to keep up with the sky,



Till Greg'-ry the Pope made some mi-nor ad-just-ments, be-fore things went fur-ther a-wry.



The Ju-li-an ca-len-dar was not pre-cise, So in se-ven-teen fif-ty-two,



Great Brit-ain a-dop-ted a dead Pope's ad-vice, The year that "Old Christ-mas" was new.

For complete lyrics, turn to the next page

Howard L. Kaplan 172 Howland Avenue Toronto, Ontario M5R 3B6 Canada

howard@thrinberry-frog.com <http://www.thrinberry-frog.com>

Performing rights administered by SOCAN

This songsheet was prepared in December 2014

One year Julius Caesar (by Plutarch's report) asked philosophers how to address Reform of the calendar used by the Romans then: some years had day counts much less Than needed to equal the span between solstices; other years' counts were much more. He set a fixed length for the year, with an extra day added one year out of four. The real year sped by with the earth's revolution, the Julian year not so fast, The error just ten point nine minutes per year, but in sum, as each century passed, Three fourths of a day would be lost as the calendar failed to keep up with the sky, Till Greg'ry the Pope made some minor adjustments, before things went further awry.

The Julian calendar was not precise,
So in 1752,
Great Britain adopted a dead Pope's advice,
The year that "Old Christmas" was new.

The Council of Trent had asked mathematicians to work out new tables and charts To guarantee that the full moon marking Easter would be the first after spring starts, Where that was defined as the date of the equinox, day and night equal in span, And Luigi Lilio, based in Verona, produced the most practical plan. The plan was approved by Pope Gregory, who was the thirteenth one taking that name. The Church made the change in 1582, and all Cath'lic lands soon did same, But Protestant England declared the plan Popish. Adoption was thereby delayed, Which caused great confusion through nearly two centuries of international trade.

In 1750, Lord Chesterfield's bill in the Parliament passed into law.
Three fourths of all centuries each lost one leap year, removing the Julian flaw.
And, in '52, by a jump past eleven dates, leap years of yore were undone,
Thus bringing the calendar into alignment with Europe and also the sun.
And though the new law required Christmas to stay in December, the twenty-fifth day,
It made agricultural fairs all eleven dates later. In much the same way,
Some common folk followed this precedent. At the year's closing, eleven days late,
They marked as "Old Christmas" the fifth of the following month, which is why it's that date.

Some references

There are useful Wikipedia articles on "Year", "Roman Calendar", "Julian Calendar", "Aloysius Lilius" (another name by which Luigi Lilio was known), "Gregorian Calendar", "Pope Gregory XIII", "Inter gravissimas" (Pope Gregory's Papal Bull concerning the calendar), "Adoption of the Gregorian Calendar", and "Calendar (New Style) Act 1750".

The full text of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750 can be found at <http://legislation.data.gov.uk/apgb/Geo2/24/23/data.htm>. The Act includes tables of the dates on which the established Church of England must celebrate holidays and other commemorations. It also specifies "markets, fairs, and marts, to be held upon the same natural days", thereby ensuring that agricultural fairs don't suddenly move eleven days earlier with respect to the seasons.

There is a general history of Old Christmas Day at <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Old+Christmas+Day>.