

THE OLD CALENDAR 1690 and AFTER

Under The Old Calendar which was abandoned in 1752 the year began on Lady Day the 25th of March and not on January 1st.

Hence for February in the pre 1752 years - the proper convention would be to use both years - as for example February 1697/98, although in today's style that would be February 1698.

Although a little confusing to us today; in order to pinpoint the year we do need to know the convention any author might be using.

This short article was brought about by reading the above in Jenny Uglow's - Hogarth: A Life and a World.

Around 1690 - is thought of as the most prosperous and productive period in our English history, for the working (cast) pewterer.

Frequently collectors, sellers and authors date pieces of certain styles and perhaps uncertain maker to this period that is – c1690. This is simply because it was the very pinnacle of cast pewter making.

It may then be worth considering what else was happening in English history at – c1690.

William and Mary came to the throne after James II in 1689. The strict religious intolerance of James's three years rule was relaxed and dissenters were allowed to meet.

In the 1690s the Bank of England was founded, as was the National Debt, and the Stock Market.

The end of the Licensing Act controlling publications allowed expression of public opinion through satires, pamphlets, newspapers and tracts. Public freedom to argue about the individual's rights, the rights of the state, and religion, was then tolerated and vigorously enjoyed.

Inland transport was still difficult. By coach, from say Carlisle to London, might take up to a week, with 100 hours of travelling time.

Unpopular wars though won against the Spanish and the French engendered patriotism amongst the people. Parliament was controlled by a determined landed elite.

This was a time when the English prospered and learned to 'live peaceably in brick houses, to grow bulbs in pots, to dine off china, to drink tea, chocolate and coffee; to take toast and marmalade at breakfast, and to read newspapers'

The fairs (which might last for weeks) and the taverns, were enjoyed by all. On the streets and about London there was a lifestyle for those who wanted it that was bawdy, permissive and licentious. And most sanitation was primitive.

Infant mortality was high and to be expected. In London the mob was easily roused to rampage through the streets. The Gallows at Tynburn were a regular public spectacle, even a day out. The heads of felons were to be seen rotting on pikes on Tower Bridge.

For the educated the numerous coffee houses provided for interest in languages in trading, conversation and gossip.

Without money and influence Society was very structured and difficult for a talented, but poorer, person to make his way.

The prospering spent on luxuries and there was a substantial population of French craftsman producing fine works for them. The insolvent were imprisoned in terrible conditions, robbed of whatever they could find to pay for release from the shackles and chains, and needed to pay for such privileges as could be bought. Generally it was only with financial help by relations or friends that they could be released.

It is worth remembering that the Great Fire of London had happened in 1666 and reconstruction continued apace for many years. The Pewterers hall and records of past pewterers were destroyed. Those pewterers working in 1667 needed recording again.

In 1711 The Spectator first appeared, as it developed it shaped the views of men and women of this generation and the next.

Interestingly London (because there are good records) could be walked by an elderly Daniel Defoe (aged over 70) around its 36 mile border. The streets in 1724 had no number, which is of considerable interest to Pewter collectors - because as Carl Ricketts has suggested the (costly) inn signs were used by many trades as a point of reference as to where they were and where customers might find them. We might assume today that there was an indifference to the marks and symbols used only because the reference contained (understood|) within that mark are now perhaps lost for good.