



News and events

- The National Archives have made the digital records on their website available free of charge while the Kew site is closed to visitors. Registered users will be able to order and download up to ten items at a time, to a maximum of 50 items over 30 days. Registration is free. For details, go to:
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/digital-downloads/
- **Next meeting:** All our meetings are cancelled until further notice.

Notes and queries

OLD AND NEW STYLE

If you enter St Helen's churchyard by the lychgate and walk towards the church you will presently notice on the left hand side of the path, just before the lamp post, an early eighteenth century head and foot stone. These mark the grave of Thomas Streete.



Beneath a carving of an angel's head and crossed trumpets (symbols of resurrection) is the following inscription, encrusted with moss and lichen:

Here Lyeth the Body of
THOMAS STREETE
who departed this Life
the 4th day of March 1716/17
In the 60th Year
of his Age

Given the apparent ambiguity of the year date, one might think that Thomas's executors were uncertain as to the year of his decease, but this was not so. Although not uncommon, this gravestone is, I believe, unique in being the only existing memorial at St Helen's that gives both the Julian and Gregorian calendar dates of

decease. These are repeated on the footstone:



This might seem bewildering but is in fact part of the legacy of the Reformation. Until the year 1582 Western civilisation followed the Julian calendar which, as the name suggests, was introduced by Julius Caesar. However, it was not very accurate and allowed the days to get out of phase with the seasons, so that by the late sixteenth century the seasons had shifted forward by ten days. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII ordered that ten days be dropped from the calendar for that year, and that New Year's Day should be changed from March 25th (Lady Day) to January 1st. He also made changes to the calculation of leap year to prevent future errors.

By 1700 most European countries had adopted the Gregorian calendar, but not Britain, which refused to do so at the behest of Rome. It was not until September 2nd 1752 that Britain complied (by which time the error had increased to eleven days) and September 2nd that year was followed by September 14th. It's said that some people thought they had been cheated out of eleven days' wages, and in one of Hogarth's paintings a placard is shown reading "Give us back our 11 days". Thus, from 1582 until 1752, if someone died between January 1st and March 25th it was not unusual to show both the Julian and Gregorian date on their memorial, and this is what was done in the case of Thomas Streete.

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