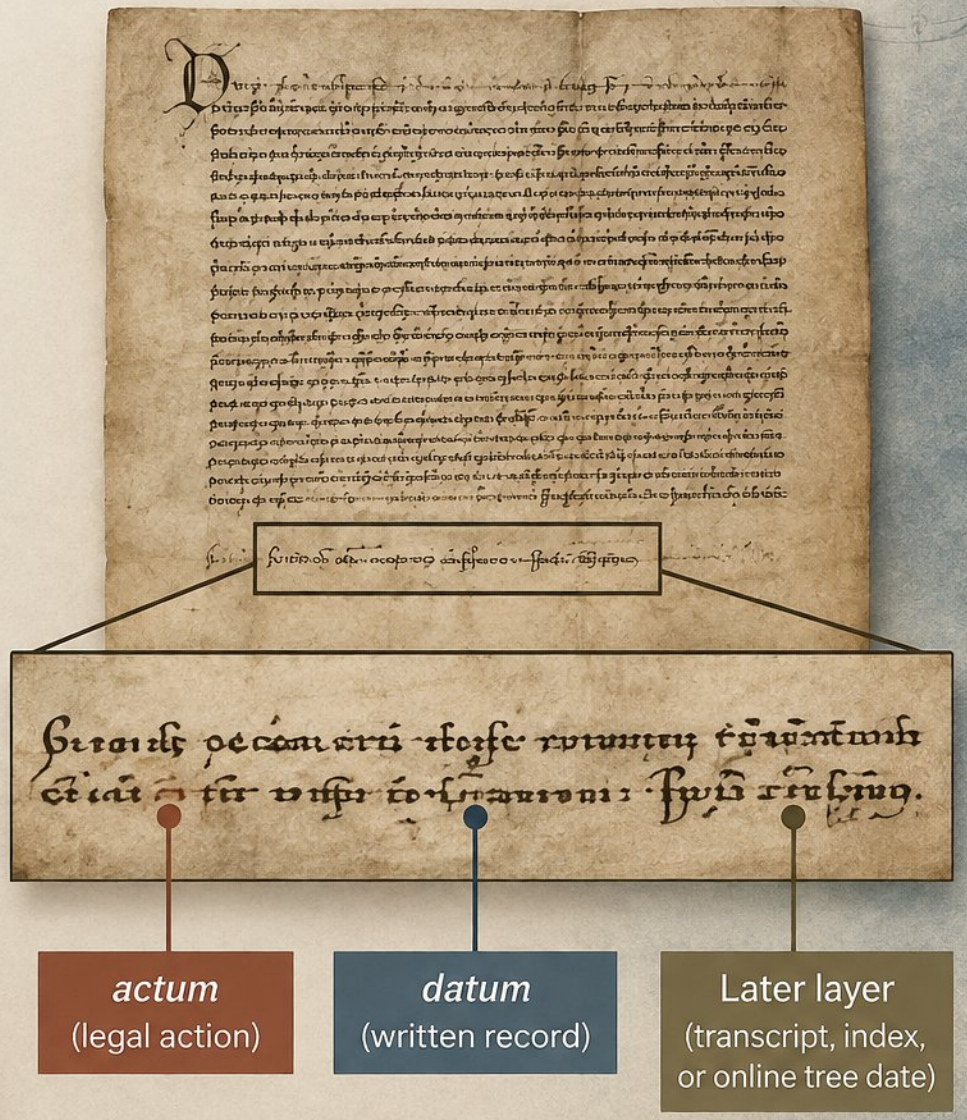
Dating Historical Documents:
Calendars and Regnal Years

- **Goal:** read, convert, and record historical dates accurately
- **Why dating matters:** chronology, identity, provenance, legal validity
- **Separate three dates:** legal act (*actum*), issue (*datum*), later copy
- **Roadmap:** calendars, regnal years, double dating, workflows, pitfalls
- **Outcomes:** convert dates, document reasoning, flag uncertainty



Three Dates Hidden in One Document

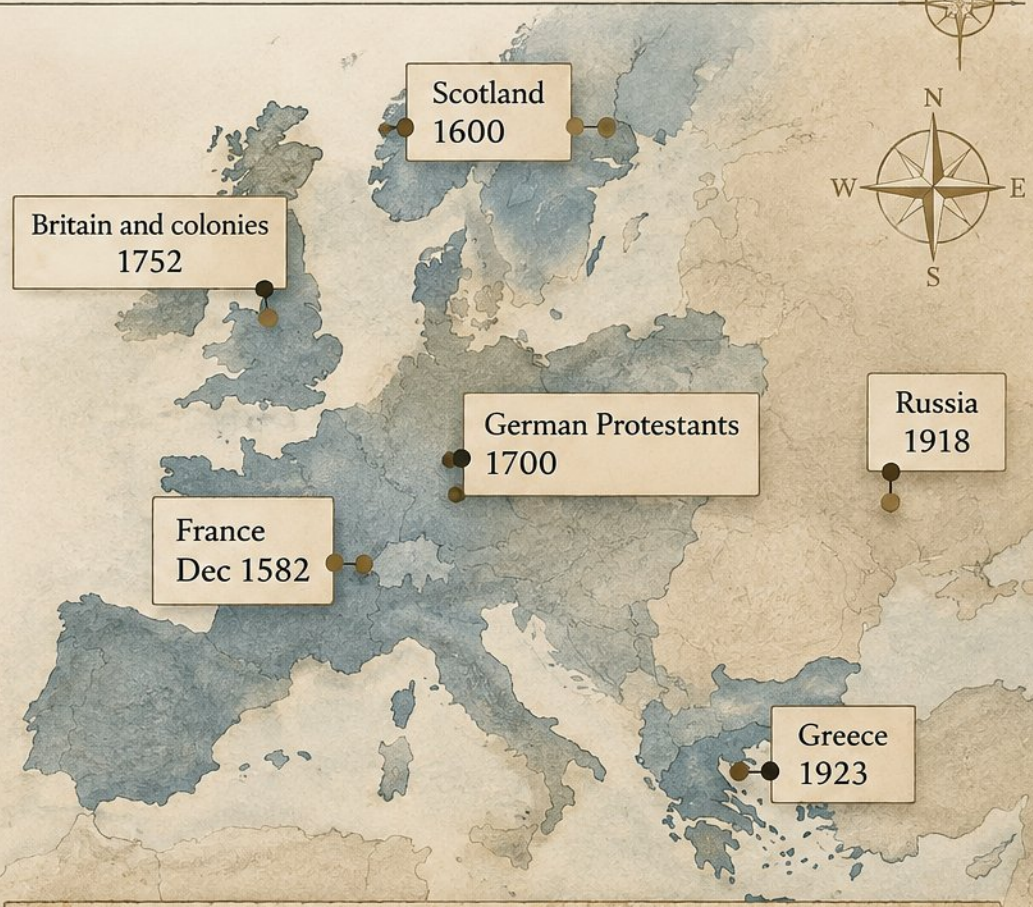
- Diplomatics separates *actum* (legal action) from *datum* (written record)
- The act may precede the instrument by days, months, or years
- Dating clauses open with *datum*, *actum*, *factum*, or *scriptum*
- Date usually sits in the eschatocol; private acts may date at the top
- Genealogy adds a fourth layer: later transcript, index, or online tree date





Julian and Gregorian Calendars in Brief

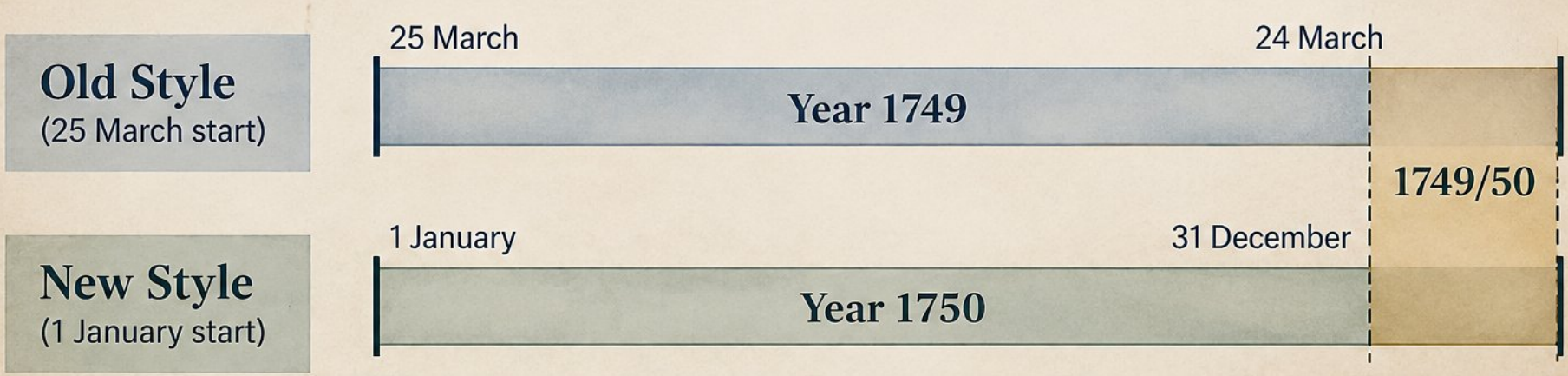
- Julian calendar: simple every-fourth-year leap rule; slowly drifted from solar year
- Gregory XIII's 1582 reform omitted 10 days: 4 October followed by 15 October
- Adoption was gradual: France Dec 1582; German Protestants 1700; Russia 1918; Greece 1923
- Britain and colonies 1752: 2 September followed by 14 September, omitting 11 days
- Scotland began the year on 1 January from 1600, creating a 1600–1751 discrepancy



October 1582

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	· · · · →	15	16	17

Old Style, New Style, and the Double Date Trap

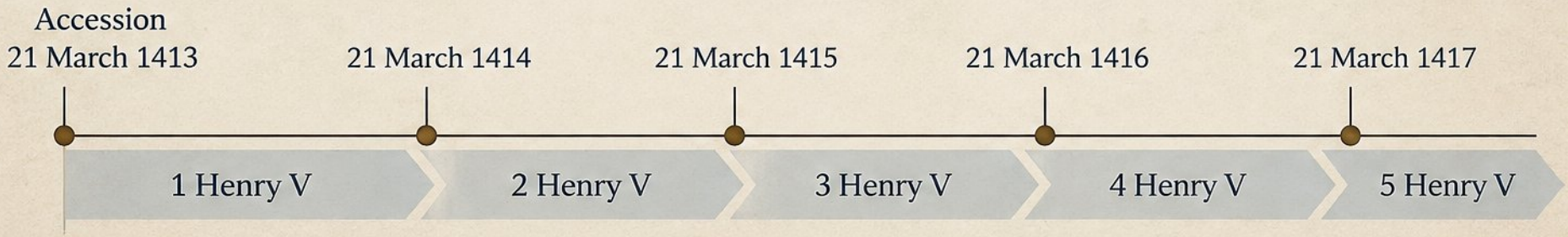


- England, Wales, Ireland, colonies: legal year began 25 March (Lady Day) until 1751
- Dates 1 January–24 March: civil year is one less than historical year
- Double dating records both: 18 February 1749/50
- Decade and century turns need two zeroes: 1729/30, 1699/00
- Identify jurisdiction and record type first; some clerks kept March start after 1752



How Regnal Years Are Counted

- Counted from accession or coronation; changes on the anniversary, not 1 January
- No year zero: the first regnal year is often a partial year
- Henry V acceded 21 March 1413: 1 Henry V = 21 Mar 1413–20 Mar 1414
- So 2 May, 5 Henry V = 2 May 1417
- Coronation-based Henry II–Henry III; accession-based from Edward II onward
- Watch special cases: King John (Ascension Day), Charles II (from 1649), joint reigns



Reading and Converting Regnal Year Dates

3 June, 9 Charles I

Ninth year began 27 March 1633

↓

3 June falls after the anniversary

↓

3 June 1633

3 February, 9 Charles I

Ninth year began 27 March 1633

↓

3 February falls before 27 March

↓

February 1633/34

- Formula: accession year + regnal number – 1; then check the anniversary.
- 3 June, 9 Charles I: ninth year began 27 March 1633, so 3 June 1633.
- 3 February, 9 Charles I falls before 27 March, giving February 1633/34.
- Latin forms: reg., R.R., anno regni, Gul. (William), Hen. (Henry), Eliz.
- Copy the document's exact wording; the year alone is not a date.

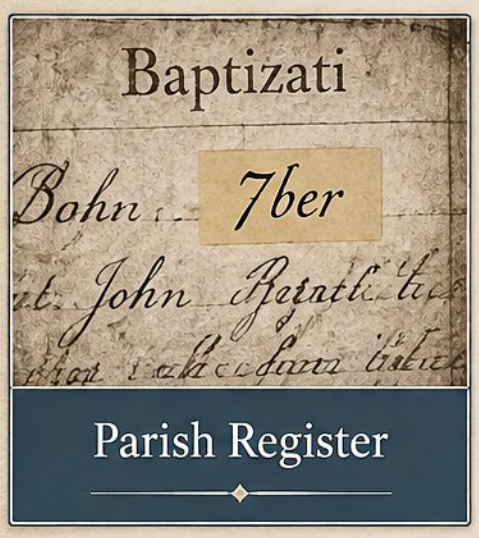
Accession Tables and the Standard Reference

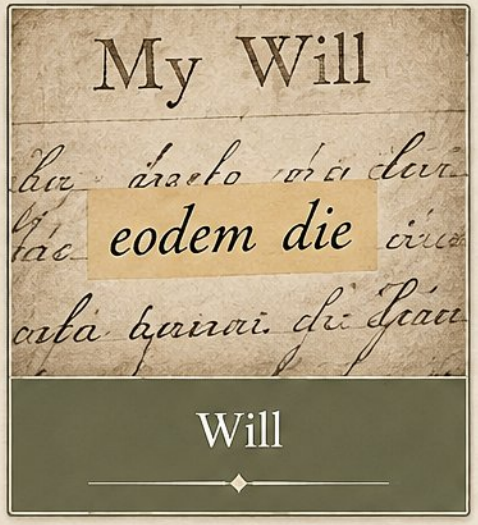
- James I: 24 Mar 1603; Charles I: 27 Mar 1625
- Charles II reckoned from 30 Jan 1649; James II: 6 Feb 1685
- William & Mary: 13 Feb 1689; Anne: 8 Mar 1702
- George I: 1 Aug 1714; George III: 25 Oct 1760
- Standard authority: Cheney, *A Handbook of Dates*
- Tables list each regnal year's first and last day
- Read footnotes for special cases before converting
- Reconcile tables with the record's region (Scotland, Ireland)

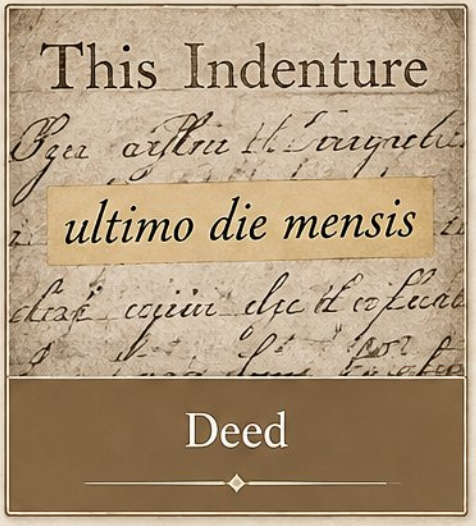


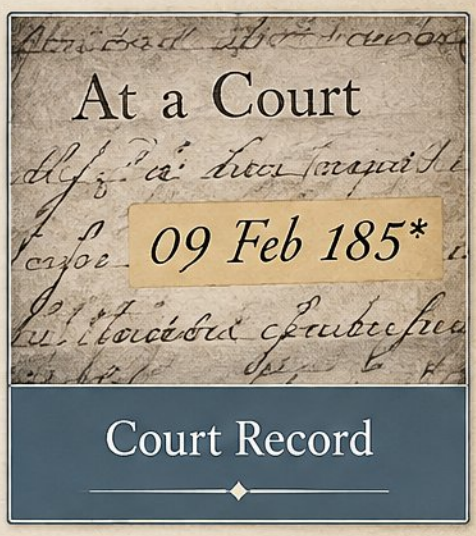
Monarch	Accession Date	First and Last Day of Each Regnal Year
James I	24 Mar 1603	—
Charles I	27 Mar 1625	—
Charles II	30 Jan 1649	—
James II	6 Feb 1685	—
William & Mary	13 Feb 1689	—
Anne	8 Mar 1702	—
George I	1 Aug 1714	—
George III	25 Oct 1760	—

Dates in Parish Registers, Wills, Deeds, and Court Records









- Registers may be jumbled, or later 'fair copies' with errors and omissions
- Scribes used Roman numerals, Latin, feast days: '7ber' = September, '8ber' = October
- Quakers numbered months and weekdays instead of pagan names
- Latin: 'eodem die' (same day), 'ultimo die mensis' (last day of month)
- Damaged dates: record what survives, e.g. '09 Feb 185*', '* Jul 1746', '* * 1761'

Conversion Workflow, Step by Step

FROM SOURCE TEXT TO A CONSISTENT DATE

1



Copy the complete dating clause: day, month, year, monarch, and style notes

2



Set the calendar and year start from place, jurisdiction, and religious community

3



Resolve the regnal year using the accession date and anniversary rule

4

Is the date before 25 March?

Apply the March year start; write a double date before 25 March

5

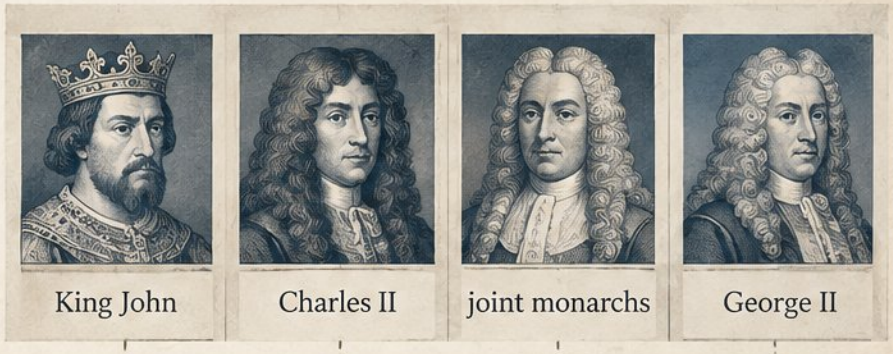


Convert Julian to Gregorian only when justified; log stated versus inferred



Reference Tables and Online Calculators

- Converters cover English monarchs and return calendar and dual years
- Check special cases: King John, Charles II, joint monarchs, George II
- Tools show only the stated date, not the clerk's actual calendar
- Use two independent methods before publishing any date
- Verify each tool's supported range and known quirks

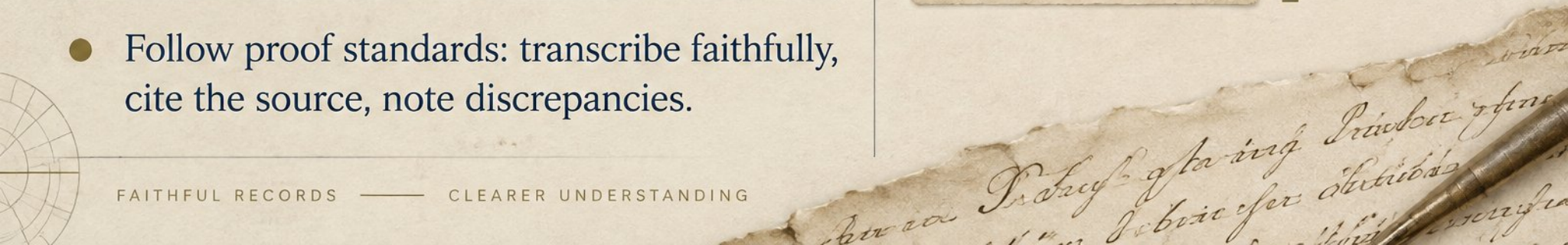




Recording Dates: Standards and Conventions

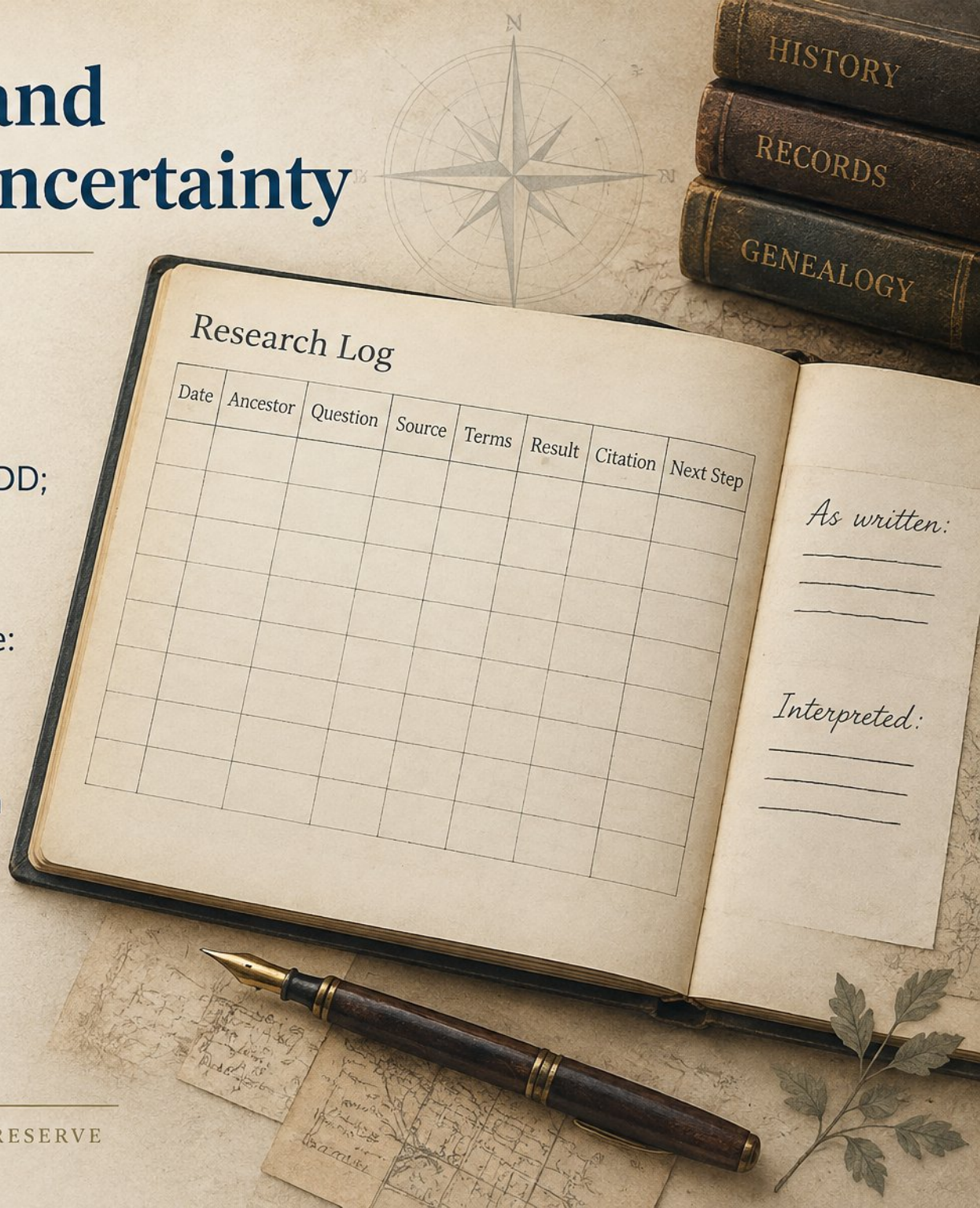
- Standard form: dd Mon yyyy — 21 Jan 1723, or double-dated 21 Jan 1723/4.
- Slash in brackets marks double dating: 27 Feb 1712[/3]; no slash signals uncertainty: 173[?3/]/4.
- Put interpretation in square brackets; keep the original wording intact.
- Lost digits: use stars or underscores — 09 Feb 185*, * * 18* — never invent.
- Follow proof standards: transcribe faithfully, cite the source, note discrepancies.

21 Jan 1723/4	Double dated
27 Feb 1712[/3]	Slash in brackets marks double dating
173[?3/]4	No slash signals uncertainty
09 Feb 185*	Lost digit shown with a star
* * 18*	Lost digits shown with stars



Research Logs and Documenting Uncertainty

- Log every search: date, ancestor, question, source, terms, result, citation, next step
- Write search dates as YYYY-MM-DD; keep record dates in their historical format
- Separate evidence from inference: state what the source says, then your interpretation
- Note access date, assumed month start, jurisdiction, and converter or table used
- Where convention is uncertain, preserve alternatives and flag the date as uncertain



Common Pitfalls and Accuracy Checks

PAST DATES
CLEARER
ANSWERS

1. Assuming January 1 always began the year shifts pre-1752 dates by a full year.



2. Ignoring jurisdiction: Scotland used January 1 from 1600; some English parishes kept March after 1752.



3. Miscounting regnal year one or adding the regnal number directly to the accession year.



4. Trusting indexes and user trees blindly; check the original image for known errors.



5. Forcing modern equivalents on ambiguous dates; flag uncertainty rather than fake precision.



SAME RECORDS. A CLEARER PAST.

Putting It Into Practice

1

Exercise 1:
15 Eliz. = 17 Nov 1572 to 16 Nov 1573

2

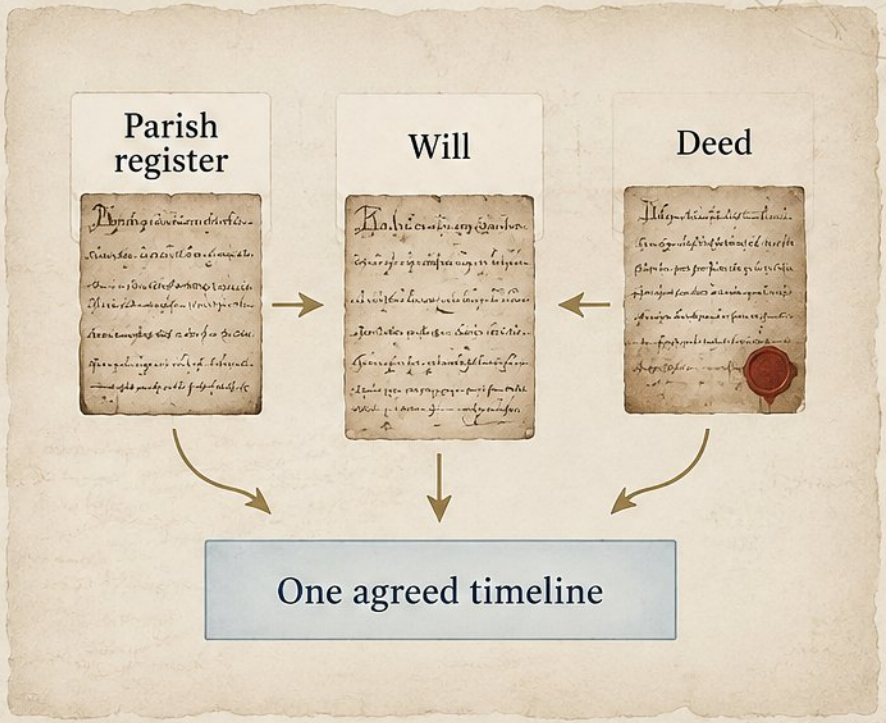
Exercise 2:
10 Feb 1713 English = 10 Feb 1713/14 = 21 Feb 1714 Gregorian

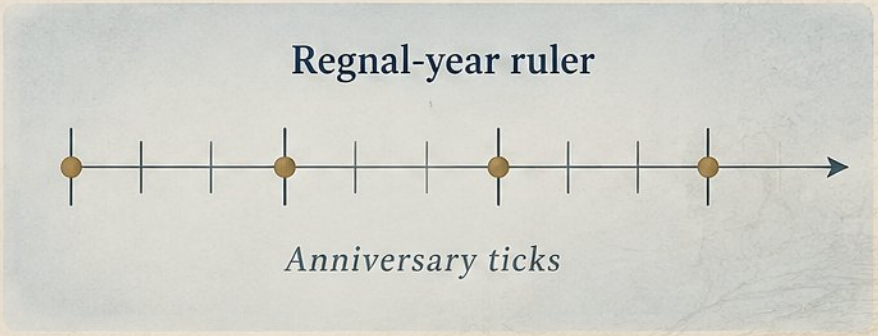
3

Exercise 3:
1 March 18 Charles II = 1 March 1666, double-dated 1666/7

Case study:
reconcile a parish register, will, and deed with differing year styles

Checklist:
copy the clause, fix calendar and year start, check the anniversary, log reasoning





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