

MWA Home and Overseas - October 2012 - British Summer Time

On the last Saturday in October, the clocks go back one hour. On Sunday we get an extra hour in bed, but it gets darker an hour earlier, this is Greenwich Mean Time (**GMT**). GMT lasts right through until Spring 2013, when the change is reversed. The summer period when the clocks are 1 hour ahead is British Summer Time (**BST**). There's more daylight in the evenings and less in the mornings. Sadly, many elderly people feel trapped in their homes in the long dark winter evenings.

Why do the clocks change twice a year?

Each town, city and village (or house even) in the UK used to check its clocks for accuracy by the sun at midday, so all clocks were correct, but only for that location. With the coming of the railways in the 19th century, the timetables couldn't cope with so much variation, so "time" was standardised across the UK.

British Summer Time (BST)

BST was first established by the Government in 1916, after a campaign by a builder, William Willett.

British Summer Time has not always applied

In 1940, for the duration of the Second World War, clocks were not put back by an hour at the end of summertime, and clocks continued to be advanced by one hour each summer until July 1945. During these summers therefore, Britain was 2 hours ahead of GMT. The clocks were brought back in line with GMT at the end of summer in 1945. In 1947, due to severe fuel shortages, clocks were advanced by one hour twice during the spring, and put back by one hour twice during the autumn,

British Standard Time

Some of us remember the British Standard Time experiment between 1968 and 1971, when the UK remained on GMT+1 throughout the year. During the first two years of the experiment there was an increase in road accidents in the morning, but many fewer accidents in the evening. However, the experiment coincided with the introduction of Drink-Driving legislation, which made it difficult to assess its true effect.

Daylight Saving proposals for reform

There are frequent attempts to change the law, although the latest Daylight Saving Bill which was supported by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (**RoSPA**) and environmental campaigners, failed earlier this year.

Daylight Saving would maintain BST during the winter months, and a "double summertime" would be applied to the current BST period, putting the UK one hour ahead of GMT during winter, and two hours ahead during summer. This proposal would effectively mean the UK adopting the same time zone as central European countries such as France, Germany, and Spain.

RoSPA suggests this would reduce the number of accidents as a result of the lighter evenings. RoSPA have called for the 1968–71 experiment to be repeated.

“Lighter Later” environmental campaigners make these arguments:

Road Safety: Change could save over 100 fatalities on the roads each year.

Energy bills: Consumers and businesses would use less energy thus saving money!

Tourism & jobs: It is estimated that 60,000-80,000 jobs will be created through increased leisure & tourism, bringing an extra £2.5-3.5 billion into the economy each year.

Prevent accidents: More daylight could prevent an estimated 1,000 serious injuries every year.

Crime: Lighter evenings would reduce crime and fear of crime.

Health: More daylight means more time for sports and outdoor activities.

These proposals are opposed by some farmers and other outdoor workers, and many residents of Scotland and Northern Ireland, as it would mean that, in northern Britain and Northern Ireland, the winter sunrise would not occur until 10:00am or even later. A strong argument against change is that schoolchildren are at risk of accidents walking to school in the dark mornings - but these days many more are escorted by adults, or taken to school by car.

Others propose the abolition of BST entirely, favouring GMT all year round, they suggest that schools and businesses could simply alter their working times which would achieve similar results without disrupting a scientific standard.

Another alternative would be for Scotland and Northern Ireland to have their own time zones. Many countries do so, and there are different time zones across Europe.

What do you think?

Naomi Hancock