these centuries say that
ion of the Black Death
creasingly frail and un-

simple, sack-like tunics
Monty Python movies,
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year 1000, natural veg-
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Calendar shows the
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It looks so slow and primitive to us, the heavy plough dragged by the oxen train. But compared to farming technologies in many other parts of the world at that time, the wheeled and iron-bladed plough of northwestern Europe was supercharged, enabling just two men to tear up a whole acre of soil with the help of the beasts which not only provided the "horsepower," but enriched the fields with their manure.

The wheeled plough was the foundation of life for English people living in the year 1000. It opened the soil to air and water, enabling soluble minerals to reach deep levels, while rooting out weeds and tossing them aside to wither in the open air. It was not a new invention. In the middle of the first century A.D., the Roman historian Pliny the Elder described some such device in use to the north of the Alps, and the evidence suggests that this powerful and handy machine was the crucial element in cultivating the land cleared from Europe's northwestern forests.[6] One man to hold the plough, one to walk with the oxen, coaxing and singing and, when necessary, goading the animals forward with a stick: this drawing shows the furrows of freshly turned earth, the secret of how the soil had been tamed in the course of the previous centuries. It was the reason why, by the turn of the millennium, England was able to support a population of at least a million souls.

The calendar page on which the wheeled plough was sketched represented an equally developed and practical technology — the measuring of time. Today we take calendars for granted. Garages hand them out for nothing at Christmas. But the challenge of how to formulate a working system of dates had consumed the energies of the