

The Annunciation of the Blessed Mary, Lady Day: March 25th

March was a busy time in both the farming and church year. It is spring and planting time but also Lent and in some years Easter. In the middle of all this fell the feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. It was a joyful feast as it marked the day the Angel Gabriel came to Mary to tell her she would give birth to Christ. "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son and shalt call his name Jesus ..." Luke 1:31

The annunciation was a Quarter Day, when tenants paid one quarter of their annual rent to the Lord of the manor, their Landlord. It was called Lady Day after Mary and up until 1752 when the calendar changed from the Julian to the Gregorian, it was the official first day of the year. April 6th, the beginning of the Tax Year retains this tradition. It would be Lady Day and the first day of the year, before the Calendar Reforms that took away eleven days.



The reform of the calendar was required because the Julian calendar, introduced in 45 BC had moved out of phase with the earth's movement around the sun. Though the Julian calendar was 365 days a year plus a leap day in February every four years, this was not exact enough, it was out by 11 minutes per year, which was one day in every 134 years which by 1582 had amounted to 10 days, meaning the Equinox, the day when night and day are equal, was falling on March 11th. Since Easter is tied to the equinox, albeit using a rather complicated church calendar cycle, something had to be done. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII adopted a new calendar which took into account the 11 minutes by missing one leap year ever 100 years and moving the calendar forward 10 days. It was not until 2 September 1752 that Britain followed, by which time the calendar was out by 11 days.