

= The Black Adder =

The Black Adder is the first series of the BBC sitcom Blackadder, written by Richard Curtis and Rowan Atkinson, directed by Martin Shardlow and produced by John Lloyd. The series was originally aired on BBC One from 15 June 1983 to 20 July 1983, and was a joint production with the Australian Seven Network. Set in 1485 at the end of the British Middle Ages, the series is written as a secret history which contends that King Richard III won the Battle of Bosworth Field, only to be unintentionally assassinated by his nephew Edmund, and is succeeded by Richard IV, one of the Princes in the Tower.

The series follows the exploits of Richard IV's unfavoured second son Edmund (who calls himself "The Black Adder") in his various attempts to increase his standing with his father and in the final episode his quest to overthrow him. Conceived while Atkinson and Curtis were working on Not the Nine O'Clock News, the series covers a number of medieval issues in Britain in a humorous and often anachronistic manner - witchcraft, Royal succession, European relations, the Crusades and the conflict between the Crown and the Church. The filming of the series was highly ambitious, with a large cast and much location shooting. The series also features Shakespearean dialogue, often adapted for comic effect.

= = Plot = =

Set in the Middle Ages, the series is written as an alternate history. It opens on 21 August 1485, the eve of the Battle of Bosworth Field, which in the series is won not by Henry Tudor (as in reality) but by Richard III. Richard III, played by Peter Cook, is presented as a good king who doted on his nephews, contrary to the Shakespearean view of him as a hunchbacked, infanticidal monster.

After his victory in the battle, Richard III is unintentionally killed by Lord Edmund Plantagenet; Richard attempts to take Edmund's horse, which he thinks is his own. Not recognizing the king, Edmund thinks Richard is stealing it and cuts his head off. The late King's nephew, Richard, Duke of York (played by Brian Blessed) who is Lord Edmund Plantagenet's father, is then crowned as Richard IV. Lord Edmund himself did not take part in the battle after arriving late, but later claims to have killed 450 peasants and several nobles, one of whom had actually been killed by his brother in the battle.

King Richard IV of England and XII of Scotland and his Queen Gertrude of Flanders have two sons: Harry, Prince of Wales and his younger brother Prince Edmund. Of the two, Harry is by far his father's favourite, the King barely acknowledging his second son's existence. It is a running gag throughout the series that Edmund's father cannot even remember his name. However, despite his mostly dismissive attitude toward his second son, the series' finale makes it clear that the King loves Edmund as much as Harry: on Edmund's deathbed, the King does his best to console him and has the entire court drink a toast in his honour. In the third episode, when Edmund becomes the Archbishop of Canterbury and helps his father to secure some land before the church, the King acknowledges Edmund as his son, embraces him and even mentions to the Queen that he has "turned out well".

Using this premise, the series follows the fictitious reign of Richard IV (1485-98) through the experiences of Prince Edmund, who styles himself as "The Black Adder", and his two sidekicks: the imbecilic Lord Percy Percy, the Duke of Northumberland (Tim McInnerny); and Baldrick (Tony Robinson), a more intelligent servant of no status.

By the end of the series, events converge with accepted history, when King Richard IV and his entire family are poisoned, allowing Henry Tudor to take the throne as King Henry VII. He then rewrites history, presenting Richard III as a monster, and eliminating Richard IV's reign from the history books. In reality, Richard, Duke of York, one of the Princes in the Tower, was only twelve years old (and perhaps two years dead) when the Battle of Bosworth Field took place in 1485, and thus too young to have had two adult sons. One notable anachronism is Edmund's title, Duke of Edinburgh, as Scotland was an independent kingdom ruled by a different royal house from its inception in the ninth century until 1603 (with the exception of some periods during the turmoil of

the Scottish Wars of Independence) though given that this is an alternate history , it is possible that Henry Tudor falsified the history of Scotland as well .

= = = Episodes = = =

The episodes in this series , written by Rowan Atkinson and Richard Curtis , were originally shown on BBC One on Wednesday evenings , 21 : 25 ? 22 : 00 . Each episode ran for roughly 33 minutes . The series began on 15 June 1983 .

Each of the episodes was based on a medieval theme ? the Wars of the Roses , the Crusades and Royal succession , the conflict between the Crown and the Church , arranged marriages between monarchies , and the Plague and witchcraft . The final episode follows a planned coup d'état .

The series was broadcast shortly after the BBC Television Shakespeare productions of Shakespeare 's four plays about the Wars of the Roses , the three @-@ part Henry VI plays , followed by Richard III , which was first shown on 23 January 1983 . Some of the same actors were used to enhance the parody of Shakespearean history . Ron Cook , who played Richard III in the Shakespeare productions , is cast as the villainous " Sean the Irish Bastard " . Peter Benson , who played Shakespeare 's Henry VI , played Henry VII in the first episode .

= = = Character development = = =

In this series , the character of the Black Adder is somewhat different from later incarnations , being largely unintelligent , naive , and snivelling . The character does evolve through the series , however , and he begins showing signs of what his descendants will be like by the final episode , where he begins insulting everyone around him and making his own plans . This evolution follows naturally from the character 's situation . " The Black Adder " is the title that Edmund adopts during the first episode (after first considering " The Black Vegetable ") . Presumably one of his descendants adopted it as a surname before Blackadder II , in which the title character becomes " Edmund Blackadder " .

= = = Production = = =

= = = Development = = =

Rowan Atkinson and Richard Curtis developed the idea for the sitcom while working on Not the Nine O 'Clock News . Eager to avoid comparisons to the critically acclaimed Fawlty Towers , they proposed the idea of a historical sitcom . An unaired pilot episode was made in 1982 , and a six @-@ episode series was commissioned .

In the unaired pilot episode , covering the basic plot of " Born to be King " , Rowan Atkinson speaks , dresses and generally looks and acts like the later Blackadder descendants of the second series onwards , but no reason is given as to why he was instead changed to a snivelling wretch for the first series . Richard Curtis has stated he cannot remember the exact reason , but has suggested it was because they wanted to have a more complicated character (implying that the change was driven by the writing) instead of a swaggering lead from the pilot .

Curtis admitted in a 2004 documentary that just before recording began , producer John Lloyd came up to him with Atkinson and asked what Edmund 's character was . Curtis then realised that , despite writing some funny lines , he had no idea how Rowan Atkinson was supposed to play his part . On the 25th anniversary documentary Blackadder Rides Again , Atkinson added that as the cameras were about to roll for the first time , he suddenly realised he wasn 't even sure what voice to use for the character .

= = = Filming = = =

The budget for the series was considerable , with much location shooting particularly at Alnwick Castle in Northumberland and the surrounding countryside in February 1983 . Brinkburn Priory , an authentic reconstruction of a medieval monastery church , was used for the episode " The Archbishop " . The series also used large casts of extras , as well as horses and expensive medieval @-@ style costumes . Filming at the castle was hindered by bad weather - snow is visible in many of the outdoor location shots .

Atkinson had to suffer during the making of the programme , having to trim his hair in an unflattering medieval style and wearing a selection of " priapic codpieces " . Atkinson has said about the making of the first series :

The first series was odd , it was very extravagant . It cost a million pounds for the six programmes ... [which] was a lot of money to spend ... It looked great , but it wasn 't as consistently funny as we would have liked .

= = = Cast = = =

Robinson stated in a 2003 radio documentary that he was originally flattered to be offered a part and it was only later he found that every other small @-@ part actor had also been offered the role and turned it down . The series also featured a number of guest roles , often featuring noted actors such as Peter Cook and Peter Benson in " The Foretelling " ; Miriam Margolyes and Jim Broadbent in " The Queen of Spain 's Beard " ; Frank Finlay in " Witchsmeller Pursuivant " ; and Rik Mayall and Patrick Allen (who also narrated the series) in " The Black Seal " .

= = = Title sequence and music = = =

The title sequence consisted of several stock shots of Edmund riding his horse on location , interspersed with different shots of him doing various silly things (and , usually , a shot of King Richard IV to go with Brian Blessed 's credit) . The closing titles were a similar sequence of Edmund riding , and eventually falling off , his horse and then chasing after it . All the credits of the first series included " with additional dialogue by William Shakespeare " and " made in glorious television " .

The series used the first incarnation of the Blackadder theme by Howard Goodall (with the exception of the unaired pilot , which featured a different arrangement) . For the opening theme , a trumpet solo accompanied by an orchestra was used . For the end titles , the theme gained mock @-@ heroic lyrics sung by a baritone (Simon Carrington , a member of the King 's Singers) . In the final episode , the theme was sung by a treble , in a more reflective style . The series ' incidental music was unusually performed by pipe organ and percussion .

= = Awards and criticism = =

The series won an International Emmy award in the popular arts category in 1983 . The four series of Blackadder were voted into second place in the BBC 's Britain 's Best Sitcom in 2004 with 282 @, @ 106 votes , although the series ' advocate , John Sergeant , was not complimentary of the first series , suggesting it was " grandiose , confused and expensive " .

Members of the cast and crew , looking back for the documentary Blackadder Rides Again , are also not particularly complimentary of the first series . John Lloyd recalls that a colleague commented at the time that the series " looks a million dollars , but cost a million pounds " , although admits that they were proud of the result at the time . Due to the high cost of the first series , the Controller of BBC1 at the time the second series was commissioned , Michael Grade , was reluctant to authorise a second series without major improvements and cost @-@ cutting , leaving a gap of three years before Blackadder II was broadcast , on the condition that it remained largely studio @-@ bound .

= = Releases = =

The complete series of The Black Adder is available as a Region 2 DVD from BBC Worldwide , as well as in a complete box set with the other series . An earlier VHS release of the series was also produced in September 1996 . The series is also available in Region 1 DVD in a box set of the complete series . " The Complete Collected Series 1 , 2 , 3 , 4 and Specials " , a 15 @-@ disc complete set of audiobooks published by BBC Audiobooks Ltd , was released in 2009 . A selection of one @-@ off episodes , documentaries and other appearances by " Blackadder " are featured , with some of this extra material being released on audio for the first time .

= = = VHS releases = = =

On about 5 February 1990 , BBC Enterprises Ltd released all 6 episodes of The Black Adder on two single videos and on 7 September 1992 all 6 episodes of Blackadder II were re @-@ released on ' Complete ' double VHS releases . All 6 episodes were re @-@ released on a single video release on 2 October 1995 .