



Rowan Atkinson and Philip Fox in the original pilot | CREDIT: UKTV

Only the most loyal fans of Rowan Atkinson or Richard Curtis would say that the first Blackadder series was much good. It had its moments – Peter Cook as Richard III – but featured a witless Edmund Blackadder who bore little resemblance to the swaggering character of later series. It was so different to what came later that Baldrick was really quite bright.

The curious thing about this is that the pilot episode was much closer to the Blackadder we know and love. It has never been shown on television until now.

**Blackadder: The Lost Pilot** treated us to this original incarnation. Well done to UKTV channel Gold, who could have done the annoying thing – breaking the episode into clips, interspersing footage with celebrity talking heads – but instead did it right by broadcasting the half-hour pilot in full.

Before we got to that, Tony Robinson, aka Baldrick, provided the context and spoke to some of the people involved, including Curtis. Robinson had been cast in the pilot but was forced to drop out due to a scheduling clash with a play at the National Theatre. The role was taken by Philip Fox, who played it so differently that he didn't seem like Baldrick at all. Although he did say: "I have a cunning plan..."



Tony Robinson provides welcome context | CREDIT: Matt Frost

I'm still not quite sure after watching this why series one ended up the way it did, but the reason that series two became so much sharper seems to be down to the arrival of Ben Elton as co-writer. He saw instantly that Edmund needed to be clever and Baldrick needed to be stupid.

And so to the pilot. Like the second series, it was set in the Elizabethan era, and Edmund was the Machiavellian younger son of the queen (played by Elspet Gray). Robert Bathurst of *Cold Feet* fame was heir to the throne. It wasn't riotously funny, but there were seeds of a good show in there and a fun cameo from Alex Norton as a lusty Scottish warrior.

Robinson guided the programme with warmth and affection. Curtis cheerfully admitted that it was a piece of work "about which I have no memories at all". The show highlighted such joys as Howard Goodall's lyrics to the theme song: "The sound of hoofbeats 'cross the glade/Good folk, lock up your son and daughter/Beware the deadly flashing blade/Unless you want to end up shorter..." The only omission was any reference to [Miranda Richardson](#). As the Queen in series two, her brilliant performance was surely a major factor in the show's success.

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