

THE WORST JOBS IN HISTORY



Think your job is bad? British comic actor Tony Robinson has created a TV show and book documenting the worst jobs in history -- in British history, at least. If you're cool like me, you'll remember Robinson from the *Black Adder* TV series, in which he played Baldrick, who had what was definitely the worst job in history -- to be repeatedly reborn as servant and dogsbody to the various abusive and scheming Lords Blackadder. Also, the show co-starred Hugh Laurie of *House* fame, who played various characters so far removed from the character of Dr. Gregory House that you can hardly believe it's the same actor. Anyway, as a bit of Friday fun, here are a couple of the jobs Robinson discusses. I guarantee you your job is better. **Asphalt Pounder:** In the Victorian era, someone discovered that asphalt makes for a great road covering, better than those silly cobblestones. Unfortunately, the steam roller does not yet exist. So here's a job opportunity for impoverished immigrants -- stamp around on the asphalt with your feet until it's flattened. Sounds easy. Except the asphalt is 320°F. **Plague Burier:** Do you know how to dig a ditch? Then digging graves is a good job -- steady work, easy to do. Um.. until the Bubonic Plague comes along, and you have tens of thousands of bodies to bury. There aren't enough carts, so two of you have to carry the corpses between you on slings. And all burials are done at night, so the townsfolk won't panic. Oh, and there's a 99.999% chance you'll get the Plague. So your replacement will have the honor of tossing you in a pit and throwing lime on you. **Sin Eater:** The best thing about religion is that it is relentlessly logical. For instance, if your loved one dies without Last Rites, say due to Plague, it's only logical that a piece of bread can draw the sins out of their corpse, so your loved one can go to heaven. And from that it follows that someone must eat the bread, and so swallow the sins. I mean, that's just obvious. The Sin Eater is paid good cash money to go from house to house, eating free meals. The only drawback is that the meals must be eaten off the chest of a corpse. But it's a small price to pay -- you're saving souls! Of course, you're reviled by the villagers. Well, so are lawyers and bankers. **Lead Whiter:** Making white paint in the 17th Century was so fun, they only allowed women to do it. Just climb to the top of a 40' tall vat of horse manure and urine, and retrieve lead sheets that have been sitting in there for months. Scrape the flakes of oxidized lead powder off the sheets, and use them to make paint. The job's benefits? Low pay and lead poisoning, the latter of which promotes paralysis, madness and death. **Whipping Boy:** I know what you're thinking -- this IS your job. But you probably didn't know there was such a thing as a *real life* Whipping Boy. There was no way the servants, commoners and low-level aristocratic women who actually did the real work of raising the Royal Children would be permitted to hit or punish the Precious Snowflakes. So if one of the princes or princesses was naughty, they'd bring out the Whipping Boy. This child was permitted to live in the castle or palace, and enjoy all the amenities, like not dying of the Plague. But whenever a royal child was bad, it's the Whipping Boy who got whipped. Surely, this taught the royal brats a lesson -- that as aristocrats, they would never be punished for their misdeeds, that's why we have the help! And they wonder why the French revolted.

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