



Life in Tudor Times

7. Tudor Jobs

PRESENTER: Tudor jobs: often they're hard and dirty and sometimes they downright stink! On the upside, most people can take early retirement around the age of 35 to 40. On the downside, that's because they've died. We've taken to the towns and villages across the land to find out a little more about some of those jobs.

MERCHANT: Oh, hello there. My job? Well, there are far worse out there. I'm a merchant, and as you can see, I do very, very well for myself, I must say. I've just sailed back from Antwerp in Belgium. That's where I do most of my trading, although France and Spain are on my list too. I go overseas to sell some of the finest English cloth. About 90% of what we export from England is cloth. Oh, sure. Francis Drake has done me a real favour by sailing all the way round the world. Plenty of new trade routes for me to keep an eye on, plenty of opportunities to expand, and more money helps keep my staff happy. I've got weavers, spinners and dyers to pay, don't you know. Now, enough chewing the fat with you. There's money to be made!

MILKMAID: Isn't she a beauty? I call her Chew-dor. Ha, ha! Get it? She just chews grass all day, doesn't do much else, though. *[Cow moos]* Ha. Well, apart from that! I don't have many possessions. I can't afford much more than kitchen utensils. So she's the big one, the old cash cow, so to speak. I get all my milk from her and from that I churn butter. I keep a little bit for myself and sell the rest to my neighbours for as much as I can get, about 1 1/2 pence for a 1/2 pound of butter.

NOBLEMAN: Work, work? Ah, ha! You think I've done a hard day's work in my life? Look at these hands. Pristine, I tell you! Go on, feel them, silky soft. No, no. Don't be ridiculous. I have servants, labourers, gardeners, falconers. The most I do is attend the court to meet with other noble folk or the monarch, but nothing more. No, all else is beneath me. Away with you!

MARY FILLIS, BASKET WEAVER: Hmm, I was a servant for a while. It was okay. The pay was awful though. Barely five shillings per quarter. That's basically a pound a year to you. When my family and I arrived from Morocco I was only a child. So I worked as a house servant - just chores, no school, more chores, sleep, repeat. Pretty much from daybreak to nightfall. Now I'm a basket weaver. I weave baskets out of willow. It's quite technical, but I reckon you'd pick it up. I used to make shovels which, you know, come in pretty handy with all that mess on the street.

GROOM OF THE KING'S CLOSE STOOL: I'm the Groom of the King's Close Stool. I attend to all the king's toileting needs and his dressing and undressing routine too. And in return, I get some of his old clothes and some of his furnishings. He's got some pretty swish threads, I tell you. I look after his toilet - which we carry around on our travels - towels, wash cloths, bowls for when he's...finished. Okay, so it doesn't sound great on the face of it, but it is actually a very important position. People looking for a meeting with the king can come to me first, so you best keep on my good side. I've had this job for a while, pretty much as long as Henry's been king. I've no idea what I'll do if there's ever a queen. I'm guessing my toilet duties will be for the chop.



EXECUTIONER: I just want to be loved man. There's a heart in here. I didn't even want this job. I got it because my dad did it. What's your family business? Oh. Who? Me? Oh, just death, you know, chopping heads, hanging, boiling. Oh. Bet you wish you hadn't asked.

PRESENTER: And there we have it. Tudor jobs were difficult, back-breaking in some cases and paid very little. The best way to avoid a lifetime of work...you just need to be the lucky one born into a noble family and a life of riches. Easy. Right?