



Tim FitzHigham at The  
St George's Guildhall  
Theatre in King's Lynn  
Picture: SONYA DUNCAN



The Norfolk-born comedic jack of all trades is bringing his Shakespearean extravaganza to Suffolk this summer. By Danielle Lett

# TIM FITZHIGHAM: *'You could say I was 'farming' jokes'*

Comedian. Writer. Thespian. Environmentalist. And even a world record holder. These are just some of the (many) hats that Tim FitzHigham wears with pride.

Once dubbed 'the maddest in my kingdom' by Her Majesty herself, Tim never shies away from a challenge, and is always keen to keep himself busy.

That's why this summer, he's channelling all of his energy into throwing some of the best Jubilee celebrations Suffolk has seen.

On Thursday June 2, Tim will be bringing his chaotic Edinburgh Fringe sell-out renditions of Shakespeare's classics in a Matthew Townshend Productions show at Southwold Arts Centre.

But before we get onto that, it's important we get to know the man himself, and what led him on this path.

## Humble beginnings

East Anglian through and through, Tim was born in King's Lynn and spent his early years in Norfolk.

"I grew up just outside of King's Lynn in a house on the Fens. But then the house sank, which meant we had to go to Derbyshire with my grandparents," he explains.

"It doesn't get much more East Anglian than that, living in a Fen house and it sinking. There was a period where dad would shut the doors, and we weren't allowed to play in there anymore because it had gone below the water line. My godfather said it was the only house where you needed to leave the breaks on the pram inside the house," he chuckles.

Following a move to Derbyshire, Tim then relocated to Hertfordshire and university before becoming a bit of a nomad.

But the lure of East Anglia was too strong, and after having children, he moved back here and currently resides in Suffolk.

"We were loosely based in London at the time, and I could've chosen anywhere because of my job because you're all over the place, but I just knew I wanted my kids to grow up with what I had. I wanted them to know this amazing place I grew up in - with gorgeous, beautiful farmland and countryside; massive skies; and stars at night. London is brilliant, of course, but there's not a lot of space. Even if you can only get a tiny cottage in East Anglia, you've still got access to the whole of the county."

Tim certainly has a lot of praise for this part of the world - and it could be argued that without his East Anglian roots, he wouldn't be where he is today.

Explaining how he got his big break in comedy, he says: "I was working as a farmer at the time, and I quite liked it. I wasn't necessarily the best farmer out there, but I enjoyed it, and I think I might've developed into quite a good one.

"But around that same time, I wrote a sketch show with a mate

of mine, and we took it to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival."

And the rest, as they say, is history.

Their sketch was nominated for a Perrier Award, and this in turn opened up a number of doors for Tim. "You could say I was 'farming' jokes," he chuckles.

"After our Perrier Award nomination, we were given writing contracts and were able to tour all over the place. It was a really, really lovely time, and I felt very lucky indeed."

Tim was also busy writing radio shows, and penning jokes for some of the biggest and best in the biz', including Arthur Smith, and Griff Rhys Jones.

"If you told me at the age of six, 10, or 16 that I'd get to do films with Clint Eastwood and work with Steven Spielberg, I wouldn't have believed you."

## Going green and making waves

Comedy and writing aside, Tim has also been able to channel his energy into his other passions - which have included environmentalism, and breaking world records.

"I tend to be quite positive, and I try to say yes to everything. I think there's a lesson in that somewhere."

Over the years, Tim has used his can-do attitude and willingness to throw himself into anything to help solve the ongoing environmental crisis.

"I've always tried to be eco-friendly, even as a kid. Growing up in East Anglia, nature is all around us - you can't escape it. Coastal erosion is obviously a massive thing round here, and we're losing coastlines."

His love for the environment saw Tim working alongside the UN and the Environmental Agency to help ban free plastic bags in supermarkets - and to great success.

"At the time, we were kind of on our own as people didn't really believe the science in the mid-2000s. It was a tussle to get people on board and change their behaviours, and realise if they didn't get behind this we're going to be in big trouble.

"We said we're going to make people pay for their carrier bags, and at the time, people were really cross, but we did it because you don't need a new bag every time you go shopping. Take one with you."

Tim, along with other campaigners, helped introduce a 5p charge for plastic carrier bags, and in turn, took out millions of plastic bags from the chain.

"It's a tiny thing, but it made a difference, and got people thinking. It started a knock-on effect."

Doing good comes naturally to Tim, and over the years he's also helped raised thousands of pounds for charity - thanks to his courageous and zany world record-breaking feats.

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"I've always done crazy things on my own in the corner, and I've always been the guy who says 'wow that's amazing, how can we go higher or faster?' Anyway, one day I was reading the footnote in a Jacobean poetry book, and I love footnotes, I find them fascinating. And this one footnote told of how the poet John Taylor went down the Thames in a paper boat. It intrigued me, and I said I'll have a crack that it for Comic Relief."

And that's exactly what he did.

In 2003, Tim paddled down a 160-mile stretch of the Thames in a paper boat, and while he originally set out to raise £500, he received thousands of pounds from donors after news of the stunt went global.

"It was a brilliant project, and so much fun. It also inspired me to do another one and raise more money, which led to me rowing a bath tub across the English Channel."

In 2005, Tim successfully made his way across the channel in a Victorian copper bath tub boat for Comic Relief. Not only did he set the world record and become the first person to row a bathtub across the English Channel, he also raised a whopping £20,000 for Comic Relief and the Make Poverty History Campaign.

Tim also completed other feats, such as running across the desert in a suit of armour, assembling the longest washing line in the country in Trafalgar Square, and inflating the world's largest man-inflated balloon to raise awareness of environmental issues.

"I'm always thinking of different things to do," he says.

#### A natural born thespian

But Tim's main love always been, and always will be, the stage.

That's why he has taken on yet another project, and is currently the creative director at the country's oldest working theatre - which happens to be located in his native King's Lynn.

The Guildhall of St George's roots can be traced back to the early 15th century, and its first performance took place in 1445.

"There's quite a big project on at the moment to help the venue achieve its full potential - which sadly it's not doing at the moment because a lot of people don't know it's there. We think Shakespeare performed in it, and it's just amazing that anyone can turn up there tomorrow and do a show. I'm honoured to be its creative director - and it's a big challenge - but it's exciting. We want to make sure it's working for another 575 years."

A fan of the playwright, Tim has spent years making Shakespeare more palatable for the average viewer, and that's why he cannot wait to bring his 'Tim FitzHigham and Guests' show to Southwold during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Tim and his band of merry men - fellow comic and 'Horrible Histories' star Thom Tuck and 'Young Sherlock Holmes' star Alan Cox - will take to the stage this June and re-enact

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**MAIN:**  
Tim FitzHigham at  
The St George's  
Guildhall Theatre in  
King's Lynn

**LEFT AND RIGHT:**  
Tim at the Thames  
with his record-  
breaking paper boat

Pictures: SONYA  
DUNCAN/CHARLOTTE  
BOND/CONTRIBUTED

Shakespeare's famous kings and queens.

"I found Shakespeare quite tricky when I was at school, and I think a lot of people were the same. They found it so difficult, so they'd say 'I'm not doing that anymore', and would give up. So I thought there had to be a way of putting Shakespeare across, so that everyone can enjoy it.

"There are obviously bits in Shakespeare that aren't meant to be funny, like when people are killed, but the funny parts are meant to balance out the tragic parts. Even in the tragedies, you've got a character who's there for comic relief. The comedy sharpens the tragedy, and I think very often people do Shakespeare and don't hit the comedy right, which in turn doesn't lift up the tragedy. And that's a shame - it alienates people from Shakespeare."

That's why Tim and co are teaming up with Matthew Townshend for their upcoming show.

"It's going to be great. Tom and I did something similar, when we

put on our two-person version of Macbeth, which was flawed from the start - we didn't even have enough performers for the three witches!

"Tom and I learnt half of the script each, and sometimes we'd learn the wrong halves - it was generally very chaotic. But it was an absolute smash at the festival, and sold out. People loved it. So it will be nice to get a bit of that chaos back out on stage, and see where it goes. A lot of Shakespeare's plays are based on members of the royal family, so it's fitting for the Jubilee weekend. I promise you, you will never see anything like this in a Shakespearean way again. It's very moving."

**Tim FitzHigham and Guests will be taking place at Southwold Arts Centre on Thursday June 2 at 2.30pm and 7.30pm. Tickets are £13 for the matinee, and £15 for the evening show. To find out more or to book tickets, visit [mtproductions.co.uk](http://mtproductions.co.uk) To keep up to date with Tim, follow him on Twitter at @timfitzhighamdelete this text box**