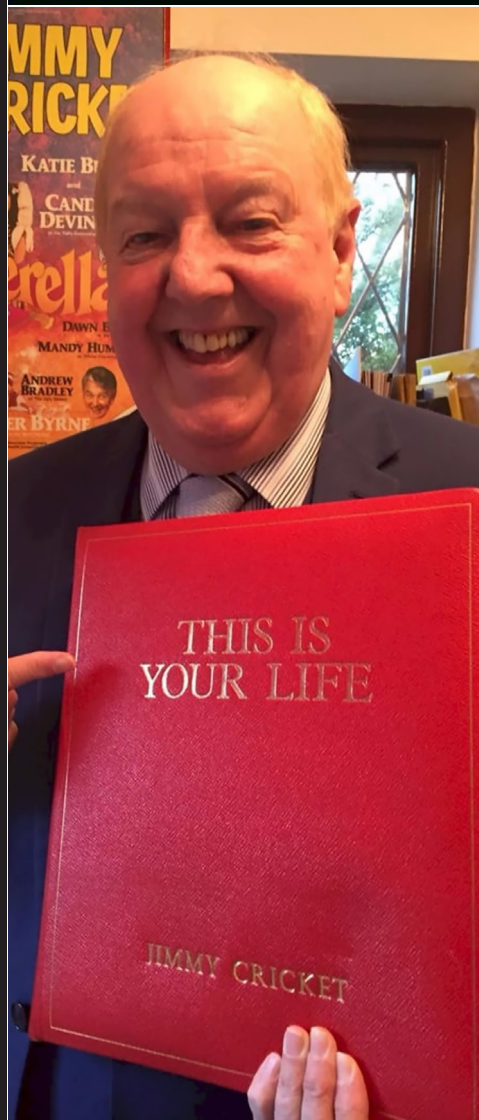


# 'Come here... and there's more'



Ashton authors Philip and David Williams celebrate 50 years of Jimmy Cricket... (and are pictured with the famous comedian below).



James Mulgrew, better known to the nation as the much-loved Irish comedian Jimmy Cricket, is celebrating over 50 years in show business by presenting a masterclass in comedy filled with one-liners, a sprinkling of visual gags, and, of course, the obligatory letter from his Mammy. Throughout his career, Jimmy's Irish logic and gentle humour have remained squeaky-clean without ever reverting to bad language or vulgarity. When you see his name outside a theatre, you know you can see the show with any member of your family in the knowledge that you'll see a top-class, clean, and funny show.

Sharing his company, we found his persona as likeable as that of his stage character. He was warm and friendly, outgoing, and showed a genuine interest in other people without a trace of any showbiz ego. Jimmy was born in Cookstown, County Tyrone, on October 17, 1945. When he was just two years old, the family moved to Belfast, where his father opened a grocery store.

As a young boy, he would entertain the customers, making them laugh with his impressions of Al Jolson. He knew then that that was what he wanted to do - entertain people. On leaving school at 16, he undertook several jobs, including two years in a betting shop, before his dream job materialised in the summer of 1966. He became a Redcoat at Butlin's holiday camp at Mosney, County Meath. This was followed by two seasons at Butlin's in Clacton before a move to the company's Metropole Hotel on Blackpool's seafront for the summer of 1969. During this time, he observed his fellow Redcoats and visiting artistes, picking up ideas from which he developed a patter act. At the end of his last season at Butlin's, it was suggested to Jimmy that he should move to Manchester and try out his Irish blarney in the clubs and pubs of the region. In between engagements to help pay the bills, Jimmy held various jobs.

He was once a door-to-door salesman. "I wasn't very good," he said. "Everyone had a door." In the summer of 1972, he returned to the holiday camps, swapping the red of Butlin's for the blue of Pontin's at Southport and Morecambe.

The time spent at Morecambe was to change Jimmy's life. He met a young waitress named May, who also performed a singing act with her sister Margaret, known as the Tweedie Sisters. After the season, the three of them returned to the Manchester area to work for clubs in the North West. Jimmy and May were married in 1974 at the Catholic church in Bury. She has been his driving force ever since. They settled in Bury before a move to Rochdale, where they raised four children: Dale, Frank, Jamie, and Katie. Both Katie, under her own name of Mulgrew, and Frank, as Frankie Doodle, followed their dad's footsteps into comedy. Frank, however, gave up showbusiness for the priesthood and was ordained in 2013. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, after all the years working in the holiday camps and the northern club scene, Jimmy found himself becoming an 'overnight star'.

A public vote had gotten him through the heats of the TV talent show Search for a Star. In the final, however, he came second to the winner, Fogwell Flax, but TV producers had been alerted to his talent. Guest spots on several peak-time variety shows soon followed, along with a change in Jimmy's attire. Gone was the white evening jacket worn on Search for a Star, replaced by what has become Jimmy's trademark outfit. These are the cut-off evening trousers, evening tail coat, konjohat, and Wellington boots marked L and R for left and right, but worn on the wrong feet.

The new-look Jimmy Cricket made an early appearance on the BBC's Good Old Days, a highly popular music hall variety show broadcast from City Varieties in Leeds. An appearance before HRS Princess Margaret on the gala TV show 'A Night of a Hundred Stars' soon resulted in Jimmy becoming a regular face on TV during the 1980s.

Ultimately, he was given his own show for ITV, 'And There's More', which ran for four series, followed by a special show, 'All Cricket and Wellies'.

There was an appearance in the 1983 children's Royal Command Show, with later appearances in the Royal Command Performance Shows. Jimmy appeared on This Is Your Life in 1987, receiving the big red book from the show's then-host, fellow Irishman Eamonn Andrews. Sadly, Eamonn passed away shortly after the show was broadcast. Of all Jimmy's TV and radio work, his own personal favourite was Jimmy's Cricket Team, which was broadcast by BBC Radio Two between 1991 and 1995.

He may no longer have a TV presence, but Jimmy still tours the country, appearing in summer seasons, pantomimes, and his own shows. Jimmy is not just a comedian; he sings, writes songs, does impressions, dances, juggles, and plays the saxophone. He has written three musicals and a comedy play, 'No More Fiffin' and Faffin', in which he has toured. He also does a lot of work performing for charities around the country.

In September 2015, he was awarded a Papal Knighthood, the highest honour in the Catholic Church, for his services to charity.

"I was humbled and honoured by the recognition," said Jimmy. "I do what I love if I can help raise money by entertaining people; sure, it's not hard work," he added.

With the pantomime season now here, Jimmy reflected on his favourite panto role, that of Buttons.

He also added: "Panto is a time for kids and visual gags. If you were doing a matinee for an audience primarily of children, then patter and gags go down the spout. So I always put in plenty of slapstick and sketches, which always go over well. Obviously, I add verbal gags in the later performances for adults."

Since making his panto debut in 1981, Jimmy has starred in over 30 across the country.

Two of which were at the Tameside Theatre, which Jimmy reflects on in our new book, which will be available very shortly. Further news on this can be read in next week's Reporter. This year, however, Jimmy is ringing the changes when, along with his wife May (who performs as May Marion), he will be presenting 'The Crickets at Home', a feast of festive fun and music for all the family at many venues. Having reached his 77th birthday in October, Jimmy shows no signs of slowing down.

In his own words: "Come here, and there's more", readers can find out where Jimmy is touring and get details of his DVD, which features his live act, from his website, [www.jimmycricket.co.uk](http://www.jimmycricket.co.uk).

• *Philip & David Williams are authors of 'For your Delectation and Delight' the first comprehensive account of popular live entertainment in Ashton. Beginning in the early 1800s when theatres were housed in simple wooden structures temporarily erected on the market ground or fashioned from old stables, churches or numerous industrial premises. The book also covers the rise and fall of the town's music halls including, amongst others, the 'People's Hall and Palace of Varieties', 'The Grand Palace and Fairyland' and the 'Grand Illuminated Grotto'. The lives of both the magnificent Frank Matcham designed Theatre Royal and the Empire-Hippodrome are both covered from their opening days to their final closures. All aspects of theatrical life is explored including the buildings, the shows, the performers and the business itself and is an absorbing account which should fascinate lovers of music hall and theatres everywhere as Ashton's theatrical history is played out from its every page. Priced at £15 the large well illustrated book is available from Hari Newsagent - stall 31 Ashton Market Hall or visit [hoydpublishing.co.uk](http://hoydpublishing.co.uk)*

