



The Fitz Files

DEVON'S TREASURED BROADCASTING LEGEND DAVID FITZGERALD SHARES STORIES OLD AND NEW WITH READERS

My honour to co-host event uniting world to tackle dementia

WELL, it has certainly been an interesting couple of weeks since we last spoke.

The International Dementia Conference returned to Devon with a massive attendance from around the world, both physically and online.

Why Devon? Simply that some of the greatest experts in the field live and operate within our county and with modern communication technology, it is relatively easy to sit in our county and talk to the world.

Each year I have the honour of co-hosting this event with the legendary Angela Rippon CBE. Our great friendship started many years ago within the broadcast industry. Sadly, it was cemented by the death of our mothers with this horrific disease, both having been diagnosed at exactly the same time.

On this occasion we had attendees from Japan, China, Europe, the United States and Ukraine. The one thing in common with all the countries is that dementia features heavily in their main medical issues and that the problem is increasing. It is estimated that there are nearly 57 million cases worldwide, with a million within the UK. But these are 'diagnosed' cases.

The numbers of people at risk or showing early signs are unknown but are simply waiting to join those massive lists.

Obviously, some countries have an even larger problem than others, such as Japan, with a huge ageing population. Some 29 per cent of Japanese are now 65 plus.

Without getting into the sordid details, different countries have different approaches to this growing issue and I hope in some small way that the conference sheds some light on the common problems and provides bridges to common ground. The event was open to everyone and I am glad to say that it was attended by members of parliament including

Torbay MP Steve Darling and his dog Jennie, who made an instant friend in Angela. The further the message travels, the more people who are aware and the greater the communication... the better.

Turning the page in my diary I can now look back on a very successful Salcombe Crabfest, a Rotary organised culinary feast attended by the great and the good of the cheffing world. When we think of Salcombe, most of us locals would consider it a temporary car park for Chelsea-registered Range Rovers, with the winter months witnessing a mass exodus back to the warmer slopes of High Street Kensington and Belgravia.

But there is a darker side to Salcombe, as I discovered when I once stood on a hill overlooking the town with a local police officer.

It was on a damp late spring evening and he pointed out that there were just three house lights on in the entire area. He was dealing with a burglary at the time, a burglary where the break-in was 'sometime' in February or March! It was a second home; nobody had been there for months and that was as accurate as he could get it.

But there is a serious industry within Salcombe and that is the landing of crab, thousands upon thousands every week destined for dinner plates in the UK and beyond. To celebrate this, every year the local Rotary club puts together Crabfest, where the entire town is 'en fête' and much-needed charity money is raised for our community.

Every year I am asked to host the event, backed by professionals! This year, once again, it was the brilliant Matt Tebbutt from the BBC's *Saturday Morning Kitchen* supported by Jane Baxter from Wild Artichokes with the master Mitch Tonks and son Ben. Over the years Matt and I have had a real laugh presenting this live stage show.

Last year George Clark from Channel 4's *Amazing Spaces* joined us. He just happened to be in the area and the event descended into wonderful chaos. This year Tom Parker Bowles arrived and I'm afraid it ended in the same manner. I'm not sure why I'm telling you all this because there is nothing I can actually report in a newspaper article on the events that



Both Fitz and his great friend Angela Rippon, pictured with Torbay MP Steve Darling and Jennie at the International Dementia Conference, lost their mums to dementia



Fitz is fed an oyster by Freddy Bird at the Salcombe Crabfest, above. Below: Mitch Tonks, left, joins fellow chefs to create seafood treats © Sarah Hayward Photography



is not going to get me into trouble.

However, it all started when one of our experts decided to make a Negroni cocktail, a drink so strong that you could actually see through time after sipping it. Then there was a Madeira tasting, then sherry, then wine and then somebody pointed out that not one single crab had put in an appearance.

Finally, dressed brown crab was beautifully prepared by the team, with anything left over placed in a homemade tortilla under the name 'cra-bab' (copyright Fitz 2025) With the paralysing effects of the Negroni wearing off, dish after dish started to appear. Talking to the local fisherman and boat owners I soon discovered that there had been a slight shortage of crab this year due to a sudden bloom of octopus... octopi... octopuseseses... who had heard of the Crabfest event and turned up in massive dining numbers. Apparently, it happens every 50 years or so, with lobster and crab numbers having been decimated. So just to balance things up, octopus carpaccio was the next dish. Delicate slices of pre-prepared marbled discs, perfectly rolled and placed on a bed of smoked salmon and prawns... beautiful. What a fantastic job you have, I hear you mutter. All you can eat, presented by some of the greatest seafood chefs in the United Kingdom and it does not end there.

I will freely admit that my life has seen some incredible invitations to the highest tables. In the past I have even been invited to The Galway Oyster Festival, The Bantry Bay mussel harvest, The Clam Celebration in Maine, USA and one of Europe's top Japanese restaurants to be entertained by the world's number one sushi chef who specialises in Fugu, puffer fish preparation... the most dangerous dish to make on this planet... look it up and the list of those who have died!

The one slight problem in all of this is... I cannot stand fish! Shellfish is even worse; I have been pretty ill in the past. The attached picture is of me being fed an oyster by legend master chef Freddy Bird at the Salcombe event... look at the face! I am not in my happy place. When asked, how was that, I answered: "It was like swallowing a heavy cold!"

Prue Leith would have put it a little better but after the Negroni, that was the best I could manage. We then tried octopus and crab flatbreads which turned out nicely, not that the audience could see much of the demo as one of them caught fire and the smoke obscured the presentation. Everyone retired to the bar happy, I went to get something to eat, hungry.

Congratulations to Matt, Mitch, Ben, Freddy, Jane and the small army of helpers and volunteers who got this show on the road and to the one and only oyster that I briefly met on stage and hope I will not be meeting again later.



Fitz keeps the show on the road