# Tea grower convicted for £553,000 scam selling foreign leaves as Scottish produce



In a bizarre twist reminiscent of classic British sitcoms, Thomas Robinson, a 55-year-old tea grower operating under the guise of "The Wee Tea Plantation", has been found guilty of perpetrating a grand fraud scheme against prestigious hotels and tea companies. The Falkirk Sheriff Court heard how Robinson duped high-profile clients, including the iconic Balmoral Hotel in Edinburgh and the five-star Dorchester in London, by marketing tea that he falsely claimed was grown in Scotland.

Robinson's deception unfolded over five years, from January 2014 to February 2019, during which he sold tea that he had actually sourced from foreign wholesalers, rebranding it as local produce. The total fraudulent activity amounts to an eye-watering £553,000, with Robinson accused of misrepresenting his operations and claiming to possess agricultural innovations that he simply did not. Such assertions included a supposed technique that allowed him to cultivate tea plants in half the usual time using a "special biodegradable polymer", a claim ridiculed by horticulture experts who pointed out the absurdity of using materials akin to black bin liners for plant growth.

The court case highlighted the audacity of Robinson's operations. Following a pattern often seen in fictional tales, the fraudster claimed that his tea was the Queen’s favourite and even boasted of selling to Kensington Palace. His marketing included an array of concocted stories about his past, including assertions of military service, academic accolades, and connections to the highest echelons of society. Prosecutors dismissed these claims as the fabrications of a self-proclaimed fantasist.

While Robinson maintained that his business practices were legitimate, he faced significant challenges in substantiating his claims. He argued that evidence vital for his defence was destroyed in a flood, yet the prosecution painted a damning picture. Using a misleading business model, Robinson disguised his deceit by routing transactions through a personal bank account and using a mailbox address in Glasgow for his consultancy operations.

The fallout from this scheme has been profound, affecting numerous buyers, including renowned tea retailers such as Fortnum and Mason, as well as France's Mariage Frères. One notable victim was Henry Baggott, a 45-year-old antique dealer who invested heavily in Robinson's claims. Baggott recounted his experience of expecting high yields from supposedly Scottish-grown tea plants, only to be left with a paltry harvest of less than four ounces after years of waiting.

The unraveling of Robinson's enterprise began when local authorities sought to verify his food processing licence, prompting scrutiny of his financial dealings and business operations. The case serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of transparency and integrity in the food and hospitality industries, particularly as they increasingly demand authenticity and local provenance from their suppliers.

As Robinson awaits sentencing, parallels are being drawn between his actions and fictional depictions of con artists, notably Del Boy from the classic television series "Only Fools and Horses." This scandal not only highlights the vulnerabilities within the luxury food supply chain but also raises questions about the lengths to which some may go in the pursuit of profit, even at the expense of truth.

The allegations against Robinson have been significant enough to prompt discussions concerning regulatory oversight in the tea industry, with experts advocating for stricter measures to ensure consumer confidence and protect against fraudulent practices. As the ramifications of this case continue to unfold, stakeholders in the industry are left grappling with the implications of misplaced trust and the long road to recovery for those affected.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063176/del-boy-tea-scam-conned-hotels-rich-clients), [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23097364.scottish-tea-grower-perth-sheriff-court-food-fraud/), [[4]](https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033), [[5]](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agri-update-friday-28-october/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063176/del-boy-tea-scam-conned-hotels-rich-clients), [[6]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1422542/Facebook-scam-attempted-facebook-fraud-backfires)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063176/del-boy-tea-scam-conned-hotels-rich-clients> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/> - Thomas Robinson, operating as The Wee Tea Plantation, is accused of defrauding luxury hotels, including the Balmoral and Dorchester, by supplying them with tea he claimed was grown in Scotland. Prosecutors allege that between January 2014 and February 2019, Robinson sold tea products purchased from wholesalers, misrepresenting them as authentically Scottish. The alleged fraud amounts to approximately £585,000. Robinson denies the charges and is scheduled to stand trial in April next year. ([thecourier.co.uk](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23097364.scottish-tea-grower-perth-sheriff-court-food-fraud/> - Thomas Robinson, known as Tam O'Braan or Thomas O'Brien, is facing charges of fraud totalling £584,738. He is accused of deceiving luxury hotels and shops, including the Balmoral and Dorchester, by supplying tea he claimed was grown in Scotland, which prosecutors say was actually purchased from wholesalers. Robinson allegedly fabricated a background involving military service and academic qualifications to support his claims. He denies the charges, and a trial is set for April next year. ([thescottishfarmer.co.uk](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23097364.scottish-tea-grower-perth-sheriff-court-food-fraud/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033> - Thomas Robinson is accused of defrauding luxury hotels and shops, including the Balmoral and Dorchester, by supplying tea he claimed was grown in Scotland. He allegedly boasted about existing deals with Kensington Palace to persuade clients like Fortnum and Mason to purchase his tea. Robinson is also accused of inventing academic qualifications and industry awards. He denies the charges, and a trial is scheduled for next year. ([scottishdailyexpress.co.uk](https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agri-update-friday-28-october/> - A businessman is accused of inventing a fake award to claim his 'Scottish-grown' tea was the 'best in the world'. Thomas Robinson, known as Tam O'Braan or Thomas O'Brien, allegedly supplied luxury hotels with tea he claimed was grown in Scotland, which prosecutors say was actually purchased from wholesalers. Robinson is also accused of inventing academic qualifications and industry awards. He denies the charges, and a trial is set for April next year. ([mills-reeve.com](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agri-update-friday-28-october/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1422542/Facebook-scam-attempted-facebook-fraud-backfires> - Anthony Cooper, who runs MG Mobile Mechanics in Rhyl, Denbighshire, was nearly scammed when he advertised a nearly new Samsung Galaxy Note 2 on Facebook's North Wales Marketplace. A person claiming to be the daughter of an older woman named Joan from County Durham showed interest. Cooper became suspicious and decided to play along. After confirming payment, he sent a box containing custard creams and a 'cheap and nasty' teabag to the scammers, turning the tables on them. ([express.co.uk](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1422542/Facebook-scam-attempted-facebook-fraud-backfires?utm_source=openai))