# Conman jailed for £553,000 scam selling fake Scottish tea to luxury hotels



A conman known as Thomas Robinson, or ‘Tam O’Braan’, has been sentenced to prison after being convicted of a fraud scheme that deceived luxury hotels and tea companies out of over half a million pounds. Robinson, 55, perpetrated a complex scam that involved selling tea he had sourced from abroad as authentic Scottish-grown varieties, thereby exploiting the credibility associated with Scottish heritage.

Operating under the guise of 'The Wee Tea Plantation', Robinson initially captured the attention of Edinburgh’s prestigious Balmoral Hotel by marketing what he described as premium single-estate teas. His claims included statements such as supplying the London Dorchester Hotel with tea that was allegedly "the Queen’s favourite." Such assertions, laden with royal connotations, legitimised his fraudulent sales pitch, enabling him to establish key partnerships with several high-end retailers and hotels, including Fortnum and Mason and Mariage Frères, France's oldest tea house.

The court unveiled that Robinson’s operations extended to renting land at a former sheep farm near Loch Tay, where he attempted to create an image of legitimacy. According to the prosecution, he fabricated stories about innovative cultivation methods, including using a so-called ‘special biodegradable polymer’ that he claimed accelerated tea growth. These spurious claims heightened the allure of his products, which were advertised with names like ‘Dalreoch White’ and ‘Scottish Antlers Tea,’ all purportedly hailing from the tartan-clad landscapes of Scotland.

However, the truth was starkly different. The evidence presented showed that Robinson procured large quantities of tea from overseas, packaging it as locally grown. His deceptive practices reportedly began to crumble as local authorities investigated his operations for compliance with food processing regulations. Robinson claimed that he had produced the tea plants at his farm from cuttings and seeds, but in reality, most of the tea plants were imported from Italy at a significantly reduced cost.

The scale of Robinson’s deceit was highlighted by an expert who noted that a kilo of premium tea could fetch up to 100 times its cost if misrepresented as Scottish. As he continued to falsely promote his products, many of the tea plants sold failed to thrive, leading to dire harvests for those who followed his advice. One buyer reported investing heavily in thousands of plants, only to yield a mere 100 grams of finished tea after seven years.

As investigations intensified, with involvement from the Food Crime and Incidents Unit of Food Standards Scotland, Robinson attempted to cover his tracks by claiming that thousands of stolen plants had hampered his operations. Yet, the court found that he had engaged in an elaborate scheme designed only to profit from deceitful representations of his products.

Following a painstaking trial, jurors took just six hours to deliver their verdict, convicting Robinson on multiple counts of fraud amounting to £553,000, encompassing both hotel and grower victims over a five-year period. As he awaited sentencing, Sheriff Keith O’Mahony cautioned Robinson about the serious consequences he would face, stating, “There will be significant sentencing consequences for you.” Robinson, who maintained his innocence throughout, claimed that necessary paperwork to contest the accusations was lost, yet the evidence presented painted a stark picture of his fraudulent enterprise.

This case has shed light on broader issues within the food sector, specifically regarding authenticity claims and consumer trust in product sourcing. The fallout from Robinson’s con highlights the necessity for stringent verification and oversight in food supply chains, particularly in premium markets, where reputation and authenticity are paramount. The tea industry may warrant additional scrutiny as the case proves to be a cautionary tale of deception masquerading as quality craftsmanship.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-update-friday-28-october/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.thescottishfarmer.co.uk/news/23097364.scottish-tea-grower-perth-sheriff-court-food-fraud/), [[6]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17603397.storm-teacup-scottish-grower-accused-faking-worlds-best-tea-award/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-update-friday-28-october/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14762689/Guilty-conman-duped-hotels-selling-fake-Scots-tea-550-000-scam.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - 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, also known as Tam O'Braan or Thomas O'Brien, appeared in court accused of defrauding luxury hotels, including the Balmoral and the Dorchester, out of approximately £600,000. He allegedly claimed to have developed a method for growing tea in Scotland's climate, supplying them with tea he had purchased from wholesalers instead of producing it himself. Robinson denied the charges, and a trial was scheduled for April the following 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, trading as The Wee Tea Plantation, faced allegations of defrauding luxury hotels, including the Balmoral and the Dorchester, out of £600,000. He purportedly claimed to have developed a method for cultivating tea in Scotland's climate, supplying them with tea products he had bought from wholesalers. Robinson denied the charges, and a trial was set for April the following 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.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-update-friday-28-october/> - Thomas Robinson, known as Tam O'Braan or Thomas O'Brien, is accused of defrauding luxury hotels out of nearly £600,000 by falsely claiming to have developed a method for growing tea in Scotland's climate. He allegedly supplied them with tea products purchased from wholesalers, not authentically Scottish-grown tea. Robinson has denied the charges. ([mills-reeve.com](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agri-update-friday-28-october/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033> - Thomas Robinson, also known as Tam O'Braan or Thomas O'Brien, is accused of defrauding luxury hotels, including the Balmoral and the Dorchester, out of £600,000. He allegedly claimed to have developed new techniques for growing tea in Scotland's climate and supplied them with tea products purchased from wholesalers. Robinson denies the charges, and a trial is scheduled for the following year. ([scottishdailyexpress.co.uk](https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/scottish-news/man-accused-bragging-royal-links-28350033?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17603397.storm-teacup-scottish-grower-accused-faking-worlds-best-tea-award/> - Thomas Robinson, known as Tam O'Braan, claimed his Scottish-grown tea was awarded gold at the Salon de Thé awards in Paris. However, investigations suggest the award may not exist, and Food Standards Scotland is looking into allegations that the tea was not authentically Scottish-grown. Robinson has not been contacted for comment. ([heraldscotland.com](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17603397.storm-teacup-scottish-grower-accused-faking-worlds-best-tea-award/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-67291088> - Anthony Williams, who called himself Lord Williams, embezzled £5 million from the Metropolitan Police and invested it in the Scottish village of Tomintoul. He bought local businesses and properties, becoming a popular figure. When his crimes were exposed, he was jailed for seven and a half years, leading to criticism of the Metropolitan Police for not detecting the fraud sooner. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-67291088?utm_source=openai))