# Scottish tea fraud unmasked as £550,000 deception over fake award shocks industry



In an intricate tale of deception set against the backdrop of Scotland’s burgeoning tea industry, Thomas Robinson—better known by his pseudonym Tam O’Braan—has been convicted of orchestrating a £550,000 fraud. The case, which recently concluded in Perth, has revealed how Robinson falsely claimed his tea plantation, the Wee Tea Plantation in Perthshire, had won a prestigious award, thereby manipulating public perception and securing lucrative contracts with high-profile clients.

The ruse began in March 2015 when Robinson proclaimed that his Dalreoch white tea had claimed a gold award at the Salon de Thé. The announcement, a significant moment for a relatively new business, garnered considerable media attention. Robinson’s elaborate tales even reached BBC Five Live, where he was quoted expressing his pride in the achievement. However, prosecutors later established that the awards ceremony never occurred; it was entirely fabricated to boost his sales and deceive hotel owners and wholesalers.

During the trial, Robinson attempted to distance himself from the fraudulent award, suggesting it was affiliated with the esteemed gourmet tea firm Mariage Frères. Yet, his claims crumbled under scrutiny, with evidence emerging that he had never received any award at all and instead concocted a narrative to enhance his credibility in a competitive industry. The Courier, which had previously reported on a supposed theft of tea leaves from his plantation, found itself unwittingly entangled in Robinson's web of lies, exposing the critical need for journalistic diligence in verifying claims before publication.

Alarm bells should have sounded for many caught up in Robinson’s deceitful practices. For example, Alistair Rea, who ran a small boutique tea business, was perplexed when Robinson insisted on a Non-Disclosure Agreement, an unusual request for a customer. Yet, Rea complied, having received a flurry of large orders for loose leaf tea sourced from various regions, often under the guise of facilitating a grand tea operation that, unbeknownst to him, was built on falsehoods.

Furthermore, the impact of Robinson’s deceit spread beyond mere financial scams. Peter Pejacsevich, a farmer intrigued by the concept of cultivating tea in Scotland, invested considerable resources under Robinson’s assurances. He later discovered that the supposed agricultural students harvesting tea on his land were figments of Robinson’s imagination. The sale of tea purportedly grown on Pejacsevich’s land at distinguished venues like the Balmoral Hotel raised questions about authenticity and ethical practices in the food industry.

The wider implications of this scandal resonate beyond Scotland, particularly in light of recent investigations into the tea industry’s ethical practices globally. Undercover reports have exposed distressing instances of sexual abuse and exploitation on tea farms supplying major brands in Kenya. These findings assert the critical need for accountability and transparency within supply chains, a stark contrast to the deception exemplified by Robinson. As consumers and businesses increasingly seek authentic and ethically sourced products, the fallout from such scandals underscores the importance of credibility in branding and marketing.

The case against Robinson serves both as a cautionary tale about the consequences of fraudulent practices and a pressing reminder for the industry to uphold integrity. It invites scrutiny not only on the authenticity of claims but also on the ethical sourcing of products—issues that are inherently connected in today’s global economy. As the tea that once promised a quaint Scottish narrative turns sour, industry stakeholders must remain vigilant to ensure that such a blight on trust does not replicate itself across the tapestry of food production.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/), [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/), [[5]](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-update-friday-28-october/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/), [[5]](https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-update-friday-28-october/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-38910968)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theindependent.com/news/business/bbc-investigation-reveals-sexual-abuse-on-britishowned-tea-farms-in-kenya-b2285576.html), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64662056)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5249241/thomas-robinson-tam-perthshire-tea-scandal/> - In March 2015, Thomas Robinson, also known as Tam O'Braan, falsely claimed that his tea plantation in Perthshire had won a prestigious award, leading to significant media attention and business opportunities. However, it was later revealed that the award was fabricated to boost sales and secure contracts. Robinson was convicted of a £550,000 fraud, deceiving luxury hotels, wholesalers, and journalists. The case highlighted the importance of verifying claims in the food industry to prevent such deceptions.
3. <https://www.theindependent.com/news/business/bbc-investigation-reveals-sexual-abuse-on-britishowned-tea-farms-in-kenya-b2285576.html> - An undercover investigation by the BBC uncovered sexual abuse on British-owned tea farms in Kenya. Over 70 women reported being sexually harassed by supervisors on plantations supplying major UK brands. Secret footage showed managers pressuring an undercover reporter for sex. In response, James Finlay & Co suspended the implicated employee and reported the incident to the police. The investigation underscores the need for ethical practices in global supply chains.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64662056> - A BBC investigation revealed sexual exploitation on tea farms in Kenya supplying UK brands like PG Tips and Lipton. Over 70 women reported sexual abuse by supervisors. Secret filming showed managers pressuring an undercover reporter for sex. Unilever, which previously faced similar allegations, sold its Kenyan operation during the investigation. The new owner, Lipton Teas and Infusions, suspended two managers and initiated an independent investigation.
5. <https://www.mills-reeve.com/blogs/food-and-agribusiness/october-2022/food-and-agribusiness-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, cultivated tea on his plantation in Perthshire, despite knowing the finished product was 'not authentically Scottish'. He allegedly supplied customers with tea products bought from wholesalers, highlighting the importance of verifying authenticity in premium food claims.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-38910968> - In the 18th century, high tea duties led to widespread smuggling in Britain. By 1784, the government reduced tea duties to 12.5%, making tea affordable and diminishing the smuggling trade. This shift in policy ended the smuggling era, allowing Britons to enjoy tea without the fear of legal repercussions.
7. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/2015-06-10/tea-tuesdays-the-scottish-spy-who-stole-chinas-tea-empire> - In the mid-19th century, Britain sought to control the tea market by establishing a domestic industry. Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist, was sent to China to smuggle tea plants and production secrets. His successful mission led to India surpassing China as the world's largest tea grower, significantly impacting the global tea trade.