# Fraudster convicted for selling fake Scottish tea to luxury hotels



In a case that echoes the antics of fictional conman Del Boy Trotter from the popular television series *Only Fools and Horses*, a real-life fraudster has been convicted of defrauding luxury hotels and tea growers out of more than half a million pounds. Thomas Robinson, 55, who operated under the name Tam O'Braan from his so-called Wee Tea Plantation in Perthshire, Scotland, was found guilty of selling repackaged foreign tea as "authentically Scottish" single-estate products. His elaborate scheme, which lasted from January 2014 until February 2019, saw him conning institutions such as the illustrious Balmoral Hotel in Edinburgh and the five-star Dorchester in London. The cumulative fraud amounted to a staggering £553,000.

Robinson's methods were as brazen as his claims. He leased a former sheep farm and displayed tea plants, all while importing over a tonne of foreign tea that he labelled as locally grown. This deceit was particularly sinister given the premium value attached to local Scottish produce; experts noted the potential profits from such misrepresentation could lead to selling inferior tea at up to 100 times its actual cost. The court case at Falkirk Sheriff Court unearthed numerous audacious assertions by Robinson; he claimed to have supplied the Queen's favourite tea and even to have developed a method for growing tea in half the usual time using a "special biodegradable polymer", which experts later compared unfavourably to a black bin liner.

The fallout from Robinson's actions is extensive, affecting a wide array of buyers, including the renowned Fortnum and Mason in London and France's historic Mariage Frères tea house. Prosecutors described his claims of personal accolades—ranging from a supposed past as a rugby star to a tantalising connection with Barack Obama—as the "CV of a fantasist". Most significantly, the apparent accolades he claimed, including an award for his tea at a prestigious event in Paris, were found to lack credibility, leading to further scrutiny from Food Standards Scotland regarding the legitimacy of his products.

The unraveling of Robinson's elaborate façade began in 2017, sparked by the Perth and Kinross Council's attempts to locate his food processing licence. His operation not only misled buyers but also led to severe dissatisfaction among those who purchased his tea plants, many of which yielded disappointing results. Clients such as antique dealer Henry Baggott invested heavily in Robinson's assurances, expecting substantial tea production but were instead met with dismal outcomes—harvesting a mere 100 grams of finished tea after seven years of cultivation.

Robinson's deceit extended beyond simple mislabelling. He created a convoluted financial structure, using a personal joint account for transactions rather than the business account of the Wee Tea Plantation, deploying a mailbox address in Glasgow to further shroud his operation in secrecy. This multi-layered approach not only misled buyers but also crafted a compelling narrative that attracted high-profile clients to his operations.

The ramifications of this scandal highlight not only the duplicitous nature of Robinson's operation but also a wider vulnerability within the high-end food and beverage market, where branding and provenance are often as crucial as the product itself. While the court's verdict may provide some closure, the incident serves as a stark reminder of the complexities and potential pitfalls within agricultural marketing and the need for transparency in the booming market for artisan goods.

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

## 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, also known as Tam O'Braan, appeared in court accused of defrauding luxury hotels, including the Balmoral and the Dorchester, out of £600,000. He allegedly sold tea he claimed was grown at his plantation in Highland Perthshire, but prosecutors argue it was purchased from wholesalers and not cultivated in Scotland. The five-year scam reportedly netted Robinson around £585,000. ([thecourier.co.uk](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/3823726/tea-plantation-perthshire-scam/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17603397.storm-teacup-scottish-grower-accused-faking-worlds-best-tea-award/> - Tam O'Braan, founder of the Wee Tea Plantation, claimed his Scottish-grown tea won gold at the Salon de Thé awards in Paris. However, investigations suggest the award may not exist, and Food Standards Scotland is probing allegations that some of his 'award-winning' tea was not grown in Scotland. ([heraldscotland.com](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17603397.storm-teacup-scottish-grower-accused-faking-worlds-best-tea-award/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/aug/09/tea-growing-farming-dorchester-scotland> - Tam O'Braan, known as 'Mr. Tea', began cultivating Camellia sinensis at his Wee Tea plantation in Perthshire in 2011. He helped establish a rooftop tea garden at London's Dorchester Hotel, featuring three varieties of Camellia sinensis. The Wee Tea plantation won a gold award from the Salon du Thé in Paris for its Dalreoch Smoked White Tea. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/aug/09/tea-growing-farming-dorchester-scotland?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-26955938> - The Wee Tea Company, based in Fife, established Scotland's first tea plantation in Perthshire. Their Dalreoch plantation, home to 2,000 plants, is among Europe's largest. The company aims to produce locally grown tea, offering blends like breakfast, green, Earl Grey, and Darjeeling. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-26955938?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://freshcup.com/a-wee-problem-scottish-tea-steeped-in-scandal/> - Tam O'Braan, also known as 'Mr. Tea', claimed his Scottish-grown tea won gold at the Salon de Thé awards. However, investigations suggest the award may not exist, and Food Standards Scotland is probing allegations that some of his 'award-winning' tea was not grown in Scotland. ([freshcup.com](https://freshcup.com/a-wee-problem-scottish-tea-steeped-in-scandal/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2019/03/02/the-dark-and-devious-history-of-tea-the-beverage-that-floated-empires/> - The article explores the history of tea, including how British merchants, including Scottish brokers, played a role in establishing tea plantations in India by smuggling tea seedlings from China. This led to the creation of a tea empire in British-controlled India. ([theelephant.info](https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2019/03/02/the-dark-and-devious-history-of-tea-the-beverage-that-floated-empires/?utm_source=openai))