



News Release
31st July 2008

CITY LEADER LAUNCHES NEW ROYAL EXCHANGE COFFEE HOUSE!

Inspired by the original 18th century Royal Exchange Coffee House located on Mary King's Close, the new courtyard café at The Real Mary King's Close was officially opened by Jenny Dawe, leader of Edinburgh City Council. The courtyard café offers visitors a calm and relaxing retreat away from the hustle and bustle of the Royal Mile, as they enjoy a quality fair-trade coffee and are tempted by some unique Scottish sweet treats!

The new Royal Exchange Coffee House at The Real Mary King's Close was specially designed by world renowned garden and exhibition designer George Carter, who also joined us for the morning, and features large pictorial screens featuring 18th century water colour images of the original coffee house and of Mary King's Close itself. Together with bamboo planters, overhead heaters and new outdoor furniture the courtyard café offers the perfect tranquil surroundings to relax away from the busy streets outside.

There's a choice of quality coffees, teas and drinks, along with delicious snacks to tantalise your taste buds – from *Berry Scrumptious*, fresh chocolate dipped Scottish strawberries and raspberries; *Stoats Porridge Bars*, made with organic Scottish oats in eight different flavours, and *Liggy's Cupcakes*, large freshly baked home-made cakes branded especially for the Close.

Stephen Spencer, General Manager of The Real Mary King's Close said: "We are delighted to be opening a new Royal Exchange Coffee House for the 21st century, offering a quality retreat for visitors, non-visitors and shoppers alike. This is part of a programme of development underway at The Real Mary King's Close, to improve our visitor facilities and further enhance the successful underground attraction."

Claire Rennie, one of the founders of *Berry Scrumptious* in Rosehearty, Aberdeenshire, said: "We are thrilled that our first stockist of our new range of chocolate is such a high profile tourist attraction which will introduce both the local and international visitor to *Berry Scrumptious*!"

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Councillor Dawe commented 'The Royal Exchange Coffee House will add to the quality amenities on offer at The Real Mary King's Close and resurrecting the connection to the past is a fabulous way of keeping the history of the Royal Mile alive.'

A unique and historic site, the Real Mary King's Close is a dark, underground time capsule and the only Visit Scotland accredited five star historical attraction. Hidden deep beneath the Royal Mile it is one of Edinburgh's deepest secrets. A warren of hidden 'closes' or narrow streets where real people lived, worked and died, it lay forgotten and covered by the City Chambers on the Royal Mile for centuries, until in 2003 it opened as a fascinating new visitor attraction for Edinburgh. Today it is a popular, award winning attraction receiving over 170,000 visitors a year.

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Notes to Editors

For further press information:

Please contact Lisa Helsby on 0131 225 0678 or Heidi Folland on 01904 527700.

The Real Mary King's Close is open daily (except Christmas Day) with tours departing every 20 minutes from 10am. Pre-booking is strongly recommended due to demand. See www.realmarykingsclose.com or call 08702 430 160 to book in advance and find out more!

Mary King's Close consists of a number of underground Closes which would have originally been very narrow walkways with houses on either side stretching up to 7 storeys high and dating back several centuries. In 1753 the Burgh authorities decided to develop a grand new building, the Royal Exchange (now the City Chambers). The houses at the top of the Closes were knocked down and part of the lower sections were kept and used as the foundations for the new building, leaving a number of dark and mysterious underground Closes and ancient dwellings steeped in mystery. The Royal Exchange Coffee House operated between the mid-18th to the early 19th Centuries (exact dates are not known). It was on the lower floor at the Royal Exchange, entered from a stair down, on the east side of Mary King's Close (now the Quadrangle of the City Chambers).

It was essentially an inn, serving coffee by day and ales and wines by night. At one end or corner was someone who took payment or handed out pipes and tobacco and water, in a booth or behind a counter on which were boxes of clay pipes and bowls of tobacco or sugar.

The coffee was drunk in cups, hemispherical or conical, usually on saucers. These, like the coffee and pipes, were distributed by boys in aprons.

As the only light came from windows onto the steps down from Mary King's Close from the Royal Exchange, it would have been very dark and smoky, with lamps of oil or candles supplying the only light.

The attached illustration shows the Royal Exchange Coffee House entrance in 1829. Due to the historical nature of this underground facility, access may prove difficult to people with certain disabilities. Ramped access is provided to the information and retail outlet. Please call for further detail. We regret that for Health and Safety reasons we cannot permit any children under the age of 5. Sensible shoes are essential! (duration of underground tour 1hr+).