



**NEWS RELEASE
2008**

**REAL STREETS...REAL PEOPLE...
REAL HISTORY...**

Hidden deep beneath the Royal Mile, lies one of Edinburgh's deepest secrets – the award-winning The Real Mary King's Close. This warren of hidden 'closes' or narrow streets where real people lived, worked and died, 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.

Now an award-winning, Scottish Tourist Board accredited five-star attraction, The Real Mary King's Close allows visitors to step back in time and be guided through these famous underground closes to witness some of the most dramatic episodes from Edinburgh's incredible past. A unique and historic site, it is a dark, underground time capsule, thought by many visitors to be haunted by its former inhabitants. In spite of this, the attraction's aim is to reveal the very real history connected to the site's amazing past, more fascinating than any amount of fiction.

It consists of a network of four streets below the Royal Mile, containing the remains of original town houses and rooms, spanning four centuries of history dating back to the 1500s. These narrow streets, with houses originally built up to seven storeys high, were used as the foundations for the Royal Exchange (now the City Chambers) when it was built directly over the top of the streets in 1753, burying them for over two centuries.

Today costumed character guides bring to life the many real stories behind the Closes, revealing the fascinating twists and turns of past lives as they tour visitors around the underground streets, giving a glimpse of life from the 16th to the 19th centuries. You are taken back in time to experience the home of a grave digger whose family were struck down by the 'black death', the workshop of the saw-maker Andrew Chesney, who was the last resident to leave the street, and the home of the famous Close's namesake, an affluent widow and merchant seamstress called Mary King.

Visitors also get the chance to visit the 'Shrine Room', in one of the best examples of a 17th century Edinburgh townhouse, where you will see the colourful pile of toys left for the wee 'ghost' girl Annie, who used to live there. She suffered from the plague and is believed to have been left heartbroken when she lost her favourite doll. Generous visitors have left tens of thousands of pounds, dolls and toys for little Annie, which are every year donated to the Sick Kid's Friends' Foundation at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh.

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New for 2008, visitors now have the unique opportunity to have their picture taken in the famous street that was 'Mary King's Close', with the impressive backdrop behind them. Until now photography has never been allowed on the Close, but the new camera uses special infra-red technology to produce an eerie picture of visitors. You never know...a ghostly inhabitant could appear standing beside you.

No visit to the Close is complete without a visit to the new gift shop. It offers a fantastic range of luxury and unusual gifts, quality souvenirs, unique themed goods and literature, to suit all ages. The new Dark Department has become a big hit with visitors, offering a unique range of luxurious and witty gifts with a difference, including black ceramics, jewellery, gemstones, toiletries and even novel black toilet paper!

If you're looking for a world-class visitor attraction with spell-binding stories, mystery, a rich history of Edinburgh and an unforgettable underground experience, there's no better place. Since the tour only lasts one hour, a trip to The Real Mary King's Close leaves enough time to take in more shops or attractions on the Royal Mile or to simply have a coffee and soak up the atmosphere of this outstanding city.

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!

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

The Real Mary King's Close is open from 10am to 9pm (last tour) every day from March 21st to October 31st, with the exception of the month of August when it opens from 9am to 9pm (last tour). From November 1st to March 31st 2009 it will be open from 10am to 5pm (last tour) Sunday to Friday and until 9pm (last tour) on Saturdays.

Admission costs: £9.50 for adults, £6 for children and £8.50 for senior citizens and students. Discounts are available for groups. For health and safety reasons we cannot permit any children under the age of five. Due to the historical nature of the site and uneven surfaces, access may prove difficult for some people.

The Real Mary King's Close is an important historic and unique site, hidden beneath Edinburgh's Royal Mile. A five star, award winning visitor attraction, it receives over 175,000 visitors a year from all over the world. It consists of a number of underground Closes which would have originally been very narrow walkways with houses on either side stretching up to seven 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!

For further information call 08702 430160 or visit www.realmarykingsclose.com

The Real Mary King's Close is operated by Heritage, part of Continuum - visitor attraction operators and specialists in the tourism and leisure industry. See www.continuum-group.com.

For further media information, images or to arrange a visit please contact: Heidi Folland on 01904 527700 or email hfolland@continuum-group.com