



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**1 July 2008**

### **The Real Mary King's Close Celebrates Continued Success & Opens New Coffee House!**

The famous underground Edinburgh attraction The Real Mary King's Close is going from strength to strength as it scoops yet another honour, celebrates its 750,000<sup>th</sup> visitor and launches a new specially designed Coffee House.

The world-class attraction has been short-listed as a finalist in the National Business Awards for Scotland in the VisitScotland Tourism Business of the Year category. This follows short-listings in the Scottish Thistle Awards for the past two years.

The National Business Awards for Scotland seek to reward and recognise excellence, best practise and innovation throughout the Scottish business community. The Real Mary King's Close will be giving a presentation on the 22 July to judges and the winners will be announced at a glittering awards ceremony on 11 September at the Glasgow Hilton Hotel.

This accolade is just another in a string of successes for the unusual attraction, which anticipates welcoming its 750,000<sup>th</sup> visitor, during August, since opening in 2003. The attraction, which is made up of a warren of underground streets beneath the Royal Mile, has consistently grown its visitor numbers year on year since it opened five years ago. Originally budgeted to achieve just 60,000 visitors a year, the attraction has surpassed all expectations, growing its business from 100,000 visitors in year one to over 170,000 visitors in 2007/8. Even in the current 'credit crunch' climate, the attraction is seeing growth, with visitor numbers up by 8% on 2007.

In addition, a programme of development is currently underway at The Real Mary King's Close to improve visitor facilities and enhance the site further. This includes the opening of a new cafe inspired by the former Royal Exchange Coffee House located on Mary King's Close in the 1700s. To be officially opened on 31<sup>st</sup> July by City of Edinburgh Council Leader Jenny Dawe, the brand new 'Royal Exchange Coffee House', situated in the courtyard outside the attraction, will be offering a selection of quality coffees, teas and drinks, together with locally sourced cakes and snacks. Especially designed by the world renowned designer George Carter, it will feature giant pictorial screens featuring 18<sup>th</sup> century water colour images of the original coffee house and Mary King's Close. It will provide a calm and relaxing retreat to escape from the hustle and bustle of the Royal Mile.

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Stephen Spencer, general manager at The Real Mary King's Close, commented: "We are delighted to be short listed in the National Business Awards for Scotland and to have received three quarters of a million visitors, beating all visitor targets hands down. The continual rise in visitor numbers is largely down to the fantastic team we have here, offering excellent customer service and entertaining tours that bring to life the fascinating real life stories behind Edinburgh's hidden underground streets and past lives from previous centuries. Combined with excellent marketing and PR, together with our successful city-wide annual Ghost Fest, the Close has excelled at attracting visitors from all over the world to see this unique underground attraction."

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](http://www.realmarykingsclose.com) or call 08702 430 160 to book in advance and find out more!

**ENDS**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

See [www.businessawardsforscotland.com](http://www.businessawardsforscotland.com) for further information on the National Business Awards for Scotland. The Real Mary King's Close is up against The Scottish Seabird Centre, The National Trust for Scotland, Heritage Portfolio and Nae Limits in the Visit Scotland Tourism Business of the Year category.

The Real Mary King's Close is open from 10am to 9pm (last tour) every day from March 21st to October 31<sup>st</sup>, with the exception of the month of August when it opens from 9am to 9pm (last tour). From November 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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](http://www.continuum-group.com).

**For further media information, images or to arrange a visit please contact:  
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