

# The People's Heritage presents Edinburgh's storytellers

*The People's Heritage: Face To Face With History in Unique Storytelling Events*



Get ready to come face to face with some of Edinburgh's greatest historical and fictional characters in a specially commissioned programme for TradFest in the Year of History Heritage and Archaeology 2017.

A series of portraits have been produced, photographed by Colin Hattersley, depicting four key characters from 19th century Edinburgh to highlight the unique opportunity to come face to face with our heritage, from the colourful cries of fishwives to the seedier underbelly of crime, from Sat 29 April to Sun 7 May.

The People's Heritage presents Edinburgh's storytellers live on location introducing key characters and unique tales from the city's popular history, as Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland Director, Donald Smith, explains:

'Edinburgh's past is rich in engrossing stories of wonderful people and events, as well as a crucial backdrop for lots of fictional characters who represent the fascinating and varied history of this vibrant city. That's what we wanted to put across with a series of impromptu performances *in situ*, from Leith to Calton Hill, showcasing through storytelling the people who populated these areas before us, unveiling fascinating insights to the resilience of some quirky characters, all for free too, so get outside and discover the steps of history you tread every day.'

The Portraits

### ❌ Fishwife (portrayed by Gillian Paterson)

Fishwives from Newhaven would have been a familiar sight on the streets of Edinburgh for hundreds of years, bringing the day's catch in creels on their backs to sell. They used distinctive calls as an alert that fish were for sale, which inspired the song 'Caller Herrin'. They had a reputation for hard work and sharp wits and were famous for their brightly coloured traditional outfits, robust statures and handsome faces.

### New Town burglar (portrayed by Peter Berry)



House breaking would have been a common occurrence in the New Town 150 years ago. A popular technique was to carefully drill out a door panel and send in a small boy to steal easily sold items like jewellery. Some New Town residents made the job considerably easier by putting a card in their front windows telling delivery boys that they were out of the country.

### ❌ Half-Hangit Maggie (portrayed by Claire Druett)

Maggie Dickson is unique in the annals of Edinburgh crime, miraculously coming back to life after being pronounced dead and cut down from the Grassmarket gallows. Perhaps it was a form of poetic justice as her "crime" was concealing the birth of her baby, who unfortunately did not survive. The fish hawker and barmaid was saved from returning to the gallows when her tapping from inside the coffin

was seen as an act of god, although some said that she had seduced and manipulated the rope maker to engineer a weaker noose.

### Coconut Tam (portrayed by Ron Fairweather)



Coconut Tam was a colourful character of the 19th century Royal Mile, with accounts recording him as Edinburgh's best-known street vendor, famed for his hump-backed stature and distinctive street cry, "Cocky nit, cocky nit, come and buy, ha'penny the bit." Selling fruit, including coconuts, from his barrow near John Knox House, he was born Thomas Simpson in Strichen's Close on the High Street and died in nearby

Potterrow, aged 71.

Specially commissioned for TradFest in the Year of History Heritage and Archaeology 2017.

TradFest runs from Wednesday 26th April to Sunday 7th May 2017 – see:  
[www.tracscotland.org/tradfest](http://www.tracscotland.org/tradfest)

*Photography for TRACS / Scottish Storytelling Centre / TradFest from: Colin Hattersley Photography.*

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