

# **#IWD – Mary King would love this day**

**As the world celebrates International Women's Day today, The Real Mary King's Close, one of Scotland's foremost visitor attractions, has released research digging further than ever before into the fascinating lives of women in Edinburgh hundreds of years ago.**

This was carried out along with a teaching fellow at the University of Edinburgh, and it cements the Close's relevance in Scottish history, and shows Mary King as an inspirational and pioneering woman, who broke social norms ahead of her time.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when women had very little status in society, and when most known females were either royalty or aristocracy, Mary King utterly disrupted this rule of convention. This shows how important Mary King's Close is for our understanding of early modern women.



### Mary King's Close

Mary King's Close had a high number of female property owners for the time, says University of Edinburgh academic Dr Aaron Allen, who compiled the research for the award-winning visitor

attraction.

The few studies that have been carried out suggest that about one in five of a town's householders might have been women. Aaron says: "Of course there were many women in the closes and streets of Scotland's towns, but most were under the headship of husbands, fathers or brothers. The 20 percent who headed their own independent households often faced suspicion in a society where everyone was expected to be under someone else's authority."

Mary King was one of them, and her Close bucked the trend. Of the four closes which make up the visitor attraction, two women owned three-quarters of the properties, while Mary King's Close was "a haven for independent women" with 45 percent of the properties having a female head of household.

Aaron explains: "Of Mary King's Close's thirty-three properties, twenty-nine householders are named in the 1635 tax record. Of these twenty-nine, thirteen householders were women, or 45 percent of the Close. Mary King's Close is one of only a few streets to reference a seventeenth-century woman. It also appears to have been somewhat of a haven for independent women. That's more than double the expected level of female householders."

Historians have suggested that in Mary King's time, women generally had very little status in society and there were many restrictions on them, from selling property to making wills, and being able to take people to court. Mary King and her neighbours defied convention.

The team at The Real Mary King's Close, would like to think that Mary would embrace International Women's Day with passion, and have plenty to say about equality. A legacy that continues to this day with the female Chief Executive of Continuum Attractions. Leading a portfolio of nine attractions, of which The Real Mary King's Close is one,

Juliana Delaney has been recognised as both a merchant Adventurer of York and one of the top 100 women in tourism.

Juliana said: "Discovering the high percentage of female-led households on our Closes, gives us a platform to delve into the women who helped to create the foundations of the city we know today. Highlighting the real stories that are so often left out by history is at the core of what we do at The Real Mary King's Close. It remains a privilege to reveal these amazing stories in such a memorable place and provide a platform for them to live on."

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