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**NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE  
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## **Gladstone's Land reopens for a taste of the past**

One of the Royal Mile's oldest buildings, the National Trust for Scotland's Gladstone's Land, starts a new chapter of its 500 year-old history as it re-opens to the public today (21 May) after a £1.5m restoration, including a brand new coffee shop and ice cream parlour, continuing the spirit of the building's long commercial use.

At the top of the Royal Mile on the Lawnmarket in the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town, the six storey tenement represents a new approach from the conservation charity, with visitors actively encouraged to connect with the property by interacting with the exhibits to find out about its fascinating history.

Items can be picked up, chairs sat on and drawers and cabinets can be opened to reveal secrets about the property's past. Interactive food tours are also planned for later in the month where visitors can even taste what our predecessors would have eaten.

Rescued from demolition by the Trust in 1934, over the last 40 years the focus had mainly been on the life and times of merchant Thomas 'Gledstones'. He bought the building in the early 17th century, extended it and commissioned its famous Renaissance-style painted ceilings.

Now though, thanks to years of meticulous historical research led by visitor services managers Dr Kate Stephenson and Anna Brereton, the lives of other residents of the property over the centuries are being told too, with three floors of rooms laid out to reflect how they would have lived and worked.

The real-life stories of individual residents and the trading history of the address shows the rise and decline of the address and also reflects the fortunes of the Old Town as a whole, bringing Gladstone's Land to life in a wholly new way.

Based on the will of wealthy 17th-century merchant John Riddoch, one room shows the recreation of his stockroom with the likes of ginger, sugar, pepper and cinnamon abounding. Another space shows a drapers based on the surviving trade accounts of a late 1700s business trading in silks, laces and printed cottons, including costumes for visitors to try on.

A whole new floor of Gladstone's Land is opening for the first time, presenting an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century boarding house inspired by Mary Wilson, a widow who in 1911 placed a newspaper

advertisement offering a room in her apartment as suitable lodgings for ‘two or three respectable men’.

On the street level, a new coffee shop has been created which is peppered with references to the property’s past. Gladstone’s Land can lay claim to be the oldest continually trading place of commerce in Edinburgh and the coffee shop (an important part of Edinburgh’s culture for centuries) continues that tradition.

As well as the decoration of the space and ingredients in dishes inspired by the property’s past, the ice cream parlour on the same floor includes a specially created ice cream flavour. Researchers developed elderflower & lemon curd as the property’s first bespoke flavour, using documents related to the first sales of ice cream in Edinburgh in the 1900s and tastes associated with the property’s history.

Self-catering apartments on the upper floor have also been redesigned to create beautiful flats for holiday lets, profits from which will support the Trust’s wider conservation activities.

General Manager for Edinburgh & East Stuart Maxwell said: “When we closed in February 2020 we expected that we’d be opening the doors to the new Gladstone’s Land in August last year but world events took over. We’re really pleased to reveal what’s been going on behind the hoardings and give people the chance to reconnect with this incredibly special place.

“Work really started many, many years ago when the team came up with the idea of shifting the focus away from the prosperous merchant who owned the property to the people who actually lived and did business there and who may resonate more so with people today. By poring over documents such as wills, ships’ logs, trade accounts and newspapers we’ve been able to put together an incredibly detailed portrait of the individuals who inhabited the property over the last 500 years.

“And we’re then presenting it in a way that is quite new for the Trust. Visitors are allowed to touch almost everything in the property and there are surprises at every turn for the curious. As well as the sense of touch, the immersive experience will involve sight, smell and taste too. There’s something there for everyone, from the specialised historian to the first-time museum goer.

“We know how much people love Gladstone’s Land and we can’t wait for them to reconnect with its impressive history, and explore the new experiences that have been added to bring those centuries to life.”

[www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk)

[www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/gladstones-land](http://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/gladstones-land)

[www.twitter.com/GladstonesLand](https://www.twitter.com/GladstonesLand)

[www.facebook.com/GladstonesLand](https://www.facebook.com/GladstonesLand)

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Free use attached images show:

1 and 2: Dr Kate Stephenson, NTS Visitor Services Manager at Gladstone's Land

3: Left to Right - Catriona Peattie (Visitor Services Supervisor at Gladstone's Land) and Rachael Tumbarello (a volunteer at Gladstone's Land)

More images are available on request.

Issued on behalf of National Trust for Scotland by Frame PR. For media enquiries contact:

Rory Weller, 07841 720 006, [rory.weller@framecreates.co.uk](mailto:rory.weller@framecreates.co.uk)

Katie Brunsmann, 07944 429 213, [Katie.Brunsmann@framecreates.co.uk](mailto:Katie.Brunsmann@framecreates.co.uk)

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### History of Gladstone's Land

Records show there was a property on the site as early as 1501 but little is known about the early residents. Thomas Gladstone and his wife, Bessie Cunningham bought the building in 1617.

17<sup>th</sup>-century Edinburgh was extremely overcrowded and by 1630 the population was roughly 25,000, making it one of the most densely populated cities in Europe. Buildings extended upwards. Gladstone's Land has six stories.

Gladstone was a middle-class merchant and the property was an investment that was intended to generate rental income. The couple extended it to the front and it is likely that they commissioned the painted walls and ceilings with the idea of attracting wealthier tenants.

Within each of these buildings (known as tenements), multiple individuals and families lived, occupying apartments of varying size and luxury, with even very wealthy residents living in this manner.

The building continued to be a prosperous commercial hub (although it was split into multiple ownership) until the late-18th century when wealthy residents moved to the fashionable and spacious New Town, leaving the Old Town to the poor.

In 1851 there were 28 people living in nine apartments in the main portion of the building whilst by 1901 there were 15 apartments and 49 residents in the same space and this had risen to 55 residents by 1911. In the 1930s the apartments were condemned as "unfit for human habitation".

The building was saved from demolition in 1934 by the NTS who purchased and renovated it, rediscovering the painted ceilings (under a layer of plaster) in the process. It was one of the first properties the Trust bought, after being set up in 1931.

The building has a long history of commercial activity, particularly with a food and drink focus. This includes a 17<sup>th</sup>-century tavern in the basement, Mr Muir's Refreshment Rooms (c.1855), Ramage's dairy (1908-1936) and several spirit dealers who ran pubs out of the building including Ross's Tavern (1857-1878) and the Robbie Burns Bar (early 20th century). This was later renamed the Rabbie Burns Bar (c.1940) and continued to trade until at least 1956, well after the National Trust for Scotland took ownership.

The refurbishment of Gladstone's Land began in February 2020 and was due to reopen in August 2020 but work was delayed due to Covid-19.

## The National Trust for Scotland

The National Trust for Scotland is the conservation charity that over 90 years has saved, maintained and shared many of the country's most loved places, rich with history, heritage, nature and culture. The charity celebrates Scotland's heritage and with more than 100 places in its care, there's a place for everyone to love.

The National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage that people from Scotland and across the world all love, ensuring its future for everyone to enjoy.

Support the National Trust for Scotland and help them protect the places we all love. Become a member at [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

We would be grateful if, when referring to the National Trust for Scotland that our name is not shortened to 'the National Trust'. We are an independent organisation, separate from the National Trust. The National Trust for Scotland is commonly shortened to NTS or 'the Trust'.

