

Prestonfield House
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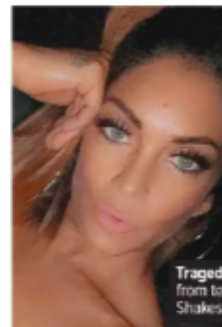


NEXT

FALL MUM'S TOWER SAFETY RIDDLE



Survival: Our story of sister Demi with Posie



Tragedy: Emma fell from 10th floor of Shakespeare Tower

Window fear... as baby 'doing well' by TOM SANDERS

A PREGNANT mum killed in a 50ft fall from a tower block that her unborn baby survived may have been a victim of a freak accident. Mystery has surrounded the death of Emma Atkinson, 38, with online theories that she took her own life countered by friends who say she was thrilled at welcoming her fifth child. She was also due to

become a grandmother and had found happiness with boyfriend Michael Swanson, 33 - a convicted burglar who has vowed to 'step up' for their child. Emma was visiting her dad in his tenth floor flat, her

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NEXT



THE PLAGUE, Burke and Hare, the World's End murders ... Edinburgh's Old Town can reflect on some grisly episodes as it marks Halloween in its 900th year.

When James Thomson acquired a decrepit 16th-century basement on Castle Hill in the late 1970s, the skeletons in its particular closet uncovered another macabre chapter from the city's past which he felt was overlooked.

The budding restaurateur soon learned Boswell's Court stood at the site where hundreds of women and men were tortured, strangled and burned at the stake as witches from the 16th to 18th centuries - often before crowds of thousands.

He believes the tenement building - next door to a church - even hosted meetings of the notorious Hellfire Club, a secret society thought to include devil-worshippers.

James, then just 20, was inspired to create the Witchery restaurant. He was the youngest licensee in Scotland. Fittingly, it opened on Halloween 1979.

Since then, he has opened an adjacent eatery, the Secret Garden, and, in 2003, acquired Prestonfield House, a five-star hotel built in 1687 by Holyroodhouse architect Sir William Bruce in the shadow of Arthur's Seat.

Having, over time, purchased the rest of Boswell's Court, James has added nine opulent suites above the Witchery and in the adjacent 17th-century Jollies Close.

His life in hospitality has allowed him to indulge the three passions he



Luxury: Clockwise from left, afternoon tea at Prestonfield House, the living area and bedroom in the lord provost suite and James Thomson tending the grounds of the hotel, pictured below



Room rates for Prestonfield House start from £375 per room, per night and includes breakfast. For more information, please visit prestonfield.com

BEWITCHING

by CRAIG GALLOWAY

Historic hotels tell a few tales that are all too often overlooked in Scotland's capital

left George Heriot's School with - history, art and drama, specifically stage design.

'I think good hospitality is theatre.' James told Metro when we visited Prestonfield and the Witchery.

'Good design, good lighting, good food, good service so that everything matches up. To me, the surroundings are very important because you want to create a memorable experience.'

'I suppose it is art in its own way because you're sourcing fabrics and designs to match with antiques and the experience.'

'The exciting bit for me is that there's always something needing changing, whether it's the suites or the public area. I get the fun out of creating new spaces.' The drama of

the suites is immediately striking. Metro's accommodation in the lord provost suite at Prestonfield and the Guardroom at the Witchery both featured separate living and sleeping quarters.

Amid antiques and luxury fabrics, both had four-poster beds that were so grand they required steps to climb on to.

There were also plenty of modern touches - large TVs with Sky packages in both rooms, a digital radio or bluetooth speaker and a Nespresso machine.

The Guardroom also came with 'guards' - mannequins in historic military dress which looked as though they could come to life at night. James,

who is only the third owner of Prestonfield in its history, believes about 30 per cent of the antiques were original to the house, including almost all of the artworks.

He has set about acquiring some that left the house over the years, including spending £55,000 on a letter left by Benjamin Franklin called Ode to Prestonfield following his visit in 1759. A suite is named after the former US president.

An American Oak planted by another former US president, Jimmy Carter, stands in the grounds. The resident peacock, Colin, is often found lounging in a 700-year-old yew tree.

Having been a childhood visitor to Prestonfield and a teenage waiter in

the restaurant, the history of the house continues to intrigue James. He says: 'There's a little bit of metal which was part of a bomb dropped by a Zeppelin during the first world war which went into the front door.'

'It's now in a case here - it brings the history of the house alive.'

There's a lot of history but there's no standing still to admire it. The Witchery has just opened a shop on Castle Hill, and Prestonfield, which is about a 20-minute walk from the city centre, will soon acquire a techno gym and wellness centre.

Although a trained chef, James' particular interest lies in wines which he personally selects during regular trips to France, where he supports

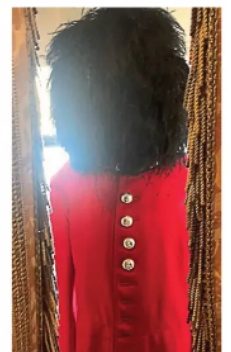
local charities as well as several at home. He has also had a 40-year relationship with Edinburgh College, sponsoring student exchange trips and providing the James Thomson Award for Customer Excellence to hospitality students.

The food and drink at both hotels reflects their five-star status, with partridge, roe deer and pheasant among the delicious options and honey from Prestonfield's own bee hives deployed in the cheesecake.

On Metro's visit there was even a real-life 'witch', as the cast of the 90s hit TV show Sabrina The Teenage Witch, as well as a Harry Potter star, were in residence for Comic Con Scotland. Bewitching, indeed.



Room rates at The Witchery start from £575 per room, per night and includes breakfast. For more information, please visit thewitchery.com



Enticing: From left, the Witchery, the Secret Garden dining room, the Guardroom living area and one of the guards in the room are all part of the experience