

Purchase of two watercolours by John Blair

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

2 December 2003

Purpose of report

- 1 To consider the purchase of two watercolours by John Blair (1850-1934).

Main report

- 2 The following two watercolours by John Blair are offered for sale:

Title: Edinburgh from the West

Date: 1906

Medium: watercolour on paper

Size: image size: 35.5 x 53.5 cm

Insc: John Blair 1906 (bottom left)

Title: Calton Hill and Calton Jail

Date: c.1880s

Medium: watercolour on paper

Size: image size: 17.2 x 25.5 cm, framed size: 36 x 43.5 cm

Insc: Calton Hill and Calton Jail (bottom left)

- 3 Not much is known about the artist John Blair. We do know that he was based in Edinburgh and that he was working between 1880 and 1920. In the 1880s much of his output was confined to book illustration. He worked mainly in watercolour and his subjects included pastoral landscapes and fishing scenes. He was a regular contributor to the annual RGI and RSA exhibitions.

- 4 Despite this lack of information about the artist, the two paintings under consideration provide an unusual glimpse of the city at the turn of the 20th century. We have no comparable view of Edinburgh from the west from any period, so this lively watercolour from 1906, taken from the side of Corstorphine Road, is unique. It is difficult to imagine the scene it portrays, for so much has changed in the intervening years. Probably painted from what is now St John's Road, the view depicts golden fields of wheat stretching into the distance. In the middle ground, the distinctive turrets of Donaldson's School can be made out, and further away the familiar outline of the Castle and Arthur's Seat are just distinguishable in the clouds.
- 5 The watercolour is in overall good condition, although the frame has been damaged in a few places, and it is still in its original pine backing board. Should the Committee agree to purchase the work, a new acid free mount, backing board and frame would be made.
- 6 The second watercolour is a charming view of Calton Hill from the Old Town, with the familiar outline of the Hill rising out of low lying mist or cloud. Of greater interest perhaps is the unfamiliar view of the Calton Jail.
- 7 The paintings are being offered for sale on behalf of a client by the Anthony Woodd Gallery, Dundas Street. The prices are as follows, and include a gallery discount:
- | | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Edinburgh from the West: | £1440 |
| Calton Hill and Calton Jail: | £720 |
- 8 Both paintings would be eligible for a grant from the National Fund for Acquisitions, and an application would be made forthwith if the Committee agree to purchase.

Recommendations

- 9 Acquire the works *Edinburgh from the West* and *Calton Hill and Calton Jail* by John Blair.



Herbert Coutts
Director of Culture and Leisure

25:11:03

Appendices	N/A
Contact/tel	Ian O’Riordan 0131-529 3955
Wards affected	City Wide
Background Papers	The Jean F Watson Bequest files are held by the Museums and Arts Division