

Purchase of a painting by Alexander Leggett

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

30 November 2007

Purpose of report

- 1 To consider the purchase of a painting by Alexander Leggett (c.1828-1884)

Main report

2. The following painting by Alexander Leggett is presented to the Committee for consideration:

Sale of Bait – Arrival of the Mussel Boats, Newhaven

Oil on canvas, 1883.

49 x 83.5cms

Price: £4,500

3. We have very little information about the life and work of Alexander Leggett. Most of his life he was based in Edinburgh, exhibiting regularly at the Royal Scottish Academy and at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts. In 1860 he exhibited one painting at the Royal Academy in London. He painted mostly in oil, and occasionally in watercolour. He was interested in landscapes and genre scenes, sometimes with allegorical undertones.
4. The painting records a view of Newhaven harbour at the height of its musselling activity. Today, it has largely been forgotten that gathering mussels was a very important part of Newhaven's fishing industry. Extensive mussel beds were at hand in the waters surrounding the village. Mussel beds around Newhaven were so prolific that they supplied bait not only for the locals but also to many other fishing villages in Scotland. The demand for mussels was so great, that according to one record, thirty boats from Peterhead and other villages called to load mussels, some having to wait three or four weeks for a load.
5. The view of the harbour is taken from the slip-way of the former Church Pier Place looking towards the new light house at the end of the pier, and the short domed building of the old harbour light. The arrival of the mussel boats laden

with their catch is accompanied by dozens of people moving around the harbour, unloading the boats, buying and selling the mussels, drying and mending the nets, etc. In the foreground three fishwives are deep in conversation, dressed in the traditional Newhaven striped outfits. All in all, it is a lively scene which conveys the bustle that would have surrounded the boats' arrival.

6. This painting is of interest as a unique record of an important aspect of the life of Newhaven. There is nothing comparable in the city's fine art collection at present. It is in good condition, having been cleaned and a small tear repaired in February 2006. The painting is being sold by Grazyna Fremi Ltd, Edinburgh. If the Committee approves the purchase, an application for grant aid would be lodged with the National Fund for Acquisitions.

Recommendations

7. Approve the purchase of the painting 'Sale of Bait – Arrival of the Mussel Boats, Newhaven' by Alexander Leggett.



22/11/07

JIM INCH
Director, Corporate Services

Appendices	None
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Wards affected	City Wide
Background Papers	The Jean F Watson Bequest files are held at the City Art Centre