

Committee on the Jean F Watson Bequest

2pm, Friday, 29 April 2016

Purchase of a painting by George Jamesone

Item number	5.4
Report number	
Executive/routine	
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Executive summary

Committee is asked to approve the purchase of the 1633 oil painting *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274 - 1329* by George Jamesone (c1589 - 1644).

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Purchase of a painting by George Jamesone

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the purchase of the painting *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274 - 1329* by George Jamesone.

Background

- 2.1 The City Art Centre's fine art collection includes works dating from the 17th century to the present day. Portraiture is an important aspect of the collection, both in terms of providing visual historical records of people and events, and also demonstrating how artistic approaches to portraiture have changed in Scotland over the centuries.

Main report

- 3.1 The following painting by George Jamesone is presented to the Committee for consideration:

Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274 - 1329

Oil on canvas, 1633

76.2 x 63.5cm (unframed); 86.4 x 73.7cm (framed)

£40,000



- 3.2 George Jamesone (c1589-1644) is one of the earliest eminent figures in the history of Scottish painting. Although he had a relatively short career, he enjoyed considerable fame during his lifetime and exerted a significant influence on subsequent generations of artists. He is widely considered to be a founding father of the Scottish school of portraiture, leading the way for artists like Allan Ramsay and Henry Raeburn. The Scottish National Portrait Gallery has a significant holding of Jamesone's works.
- 3.3 Jamesone was born in Aberdeen, and trained under John Anderson in Edinburgh. In the early part of his career most of his portrait commissions came from the Aberdeenshire area. However, his growing reputation enabled him to expand his practice to a national scale. He concentrated predominantly on portraits of the nobility and new bourgeoisie, but he also undertook more ambitious artistic projects.
- 3.4 In 1633 Jamesone was commissioned by the magistrates of the Town Council of Edinburgh to produce a series of royal portraits as part of the preparations to welcome King Charles I prior to his coronation at the Palace of Holyroodhouse on 18 June 1633. The paintings were to be displayed outside, fixed either to buildings or triumphal arches situated on the High Street, so that the King would see them on his route towards the Palace. It is thought that Jamesone and his workshop produced as many as 109 portraits of Scottish monarchs for this commission, including images of Malcolm III, James I and Mary Queen of Scots. Although none of the portraits were painted from life, and most are unlikely to resemble the actual sitters, they served an important political purpose. The paintings publicly asserted and emphasised the longevity and legitimacy of the royal line, demonstrating a continuous connection between Charles I (and his successors) and the ancient kings of Scotland.
- 3.5 After the royal visit all but 26 of the paintings in Jamesone's series were lost. The surviving portraits were acquired by either the 1st or 2nd Marquess of Lothian at some point before 1720, and these remained at Newbattle Abbey until the early 1970s. On 2 July 1971 this collection was dispersed at auction in Edinburgh, with the portraits being acquired by various private collectors.
- 3.6 *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274-1329* is one of the most significant surviving paintings from Jamesone's series of Scottish monarchs. It was executed entirely by the artist himself, unlike others from the series which are thought to have been completed with the support of assistants. Presumably due to the strict timescale of the commission, some of the portraits were painted very rapidly and with little regard for individuality. *Robert the Bruce* stands out as being produced with a greater degree of attention to detail. The painting is also one of the few to have been signed by Jamesone. As such it is considered one of the best surviving examples from this series of work.

- 3.7 The painting underwent cleaning and restoration treatment at the National Galleries of Scotland in 1973. Given the age of the artwork, and compared to many others by Jamesone, it is in remarkably good condition. It has been included in several significant exhibitions of early Scottish painting, including *Painting in Scotland 1570 – 1650*, by the National Galleries of Scotland in 1975. Between 2011 and late 2015 it was displayed at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery as a long-term loan to the collection.
- 3.8 King Robert I (known as Robert the Bruce) was born in Ayr in 1274. A member of the Scottish nobility, his titles included Earl of Carrick and Lord of Annandale. He became King in 1306, having succeeded William Wallace as Guardian of Scotland in 1298. During his reign Robert the Bruce led the fight for Scottish independence against King Edward I of England. A skilled military leader, he waged a successful campaign of guerrilla warfare culminating in the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. This victory effectively re-established the independence of the Scottish monarchy. In 1324, following the Declaration of Arbroath, Robert the Bruce was recognised by the Pope as king of an independent Scotland. His rule continued until his death in 1329. George Jamesone's portrait is among the earliest and best-known representations of this national hero.
- 3.9 Although the City Art Centre's fine art collection spans the period of the 17th century to the present day, it has very few artworks dating from the early to middle 17th century. Among the earliest works in the collection are civic portraits, such as *Sir James Steuart of Coltness (1608-1681)*, *Lord Provost of Edinburgh*, which is attributed to David Scougall. George Jamesone is not currently represented in the collection. *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274-1329* would therefore be a highly appropriate acquisition. The painting is a high quality example of this important artist's work. It is also a rare artefact in terms of its provenance as one of the surviving portraits from the series produced to celebrate the Scottish coronation of Charles I. Given that the painting was originally commissioned by the magistrates of Edinburgh, it seems very fitting that the portrait should be acquired for the City Art Centre.
- 3.10 *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274-1329* is being offered for sale to the City Art Centre by a private collector. The owner has said that they would like the painting to become part of a public collection.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Completed purchase of *Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland 1274 - 1329* by George Jamesone.

Financial impact

5.1 The total cost of the painting is £40,000. Funds for this purchase will come from the Jean F Watson Bequest, and it is intended that applications for grant aid will be submitted to the Art Fund, the National Fund for Acquisitions, and the Friends of the City Art Centre and Museums.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1 Not applicable.

Equalities impact

7.1 Not applicable.

Sustainability impact

8.1 Not applicable.

Consultation and engagement

9.1 Not applicable.

Background reading/external references

Thomson, Duncan: *The Life and Art of George Jamesone*, Oxford, 1974

Thomson, Duncan: *Painting in Scotland 1570-1650*, exhibition catalogue, National Galleries of Scotland, 1975

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Links

Coalition pledges

P31 Maintain our city's reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure

Council outcomes

CO20 Culture, sport and major events – Edinburgh continues to be a leading cultural city where culture and sport play a central part in the lives and futures of citizens

Single Outcome Agreement

Appendices