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Ownership of painting with Limerick connection disputed

By John O'Shaughnessy

A PROTRACTED dispute about the ownership of a valuable unframed painting found in Youghal, and linked to the family of Limerick-born Sir Henry Arthur Blake, a British colonial administrator, was continuing in London this week.

The painting, titled *Children Under a Palm Tree*, by the celebrated Winslow Homer, was discovered in a dump over three decades ago by an English tourist, Tony Varney, while on holiday near Youghal.

In 2008, and following a visit to the BBC Antique Roadshow by the Varney family, and where the signature of Homer was noted, it was learned that the watercolour painting was extremely valuable.

It was put up for sale at Sotheby's in New York and valued at approx 172,000 euro.

However, prior to auction, the sale was halted by Mr Simon Murray, barrister, and descendant of Sir Henry Arthur Blake, who claimed ownership for his family.

Sir Henry and his wife are buried at Myrtle Grove, Youghal, still owned by their descendants, and now home to Mr Murray's mother, Shirley.

Efforts to broker a deal between Mr Varney and Mr Murray failed. The painting remains in the



possession of Sotheby's.

According to the Irish Times, the picture was probably painted by Homer in 1885 during a visit to the Bahamas, then a British colony, and where Henry Arthur Blake was governor.

It is believed the artist was a house-guest who painted Blake's three children, Maurice, Olive and Arthur, sitting under a palm tree dressed in exotic costumes for a fancy-dress party.

Blake was born in 1840 in Limerick and started out as a

draper's assistant, but soon joined the Irish Constabulary, where he was employed as an inspector and magistrate.

He was made governor of the Bahamas in 1886 and was transferred to Newfoundland one year later, and knighted around the same time.

He subsequently served in Jamaica, Hong Kong and Ceylon, and died in 1918.

The community of Blaketown, Newfoundland, is named in his honour.

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