

Media contact: Penny Whitehead | T: 03 5292 1958 | E: penny@geelonggallery.org.au

Announcement: Geelong Cup returns home

Tuesday 30 April 2019

Geelong Gallery is delighted to announce a major acquisition from a private collection via Sotheby's Australia and the return of **Edward Fischer's 1874 Geelong Gold Cup** after 145 years.

Edward Fischer was the pre-eminent silversmith in Victoria in the second half of the 19th century, and his Geelong workshop produced gold and silver objects of such outstanding quality they are now regarded as nationally important treasures.

The 1874 Geelong Gold Cup is the earliest of only five remaining cups of the eighteen made by Fischer between 1873 and 1890. Others may have been melted down for their gold.

Following the successful running of the first Geelong Cup in 1872, the Geelong Racing Club decided to present the winner of the 1873 race with a gold cup. Edward Fischer was commissioned to make the 1873 cup and again in 1874, for which he turned to a local artist, Frederick Woodhouse (1820–1909), to design the horse 'rampant' that would crown the lid. Woodhouse was one of a small number of Victorian artists who specialised in animal painting, especially horses, and was eagerly sought after by racehorse owners to paint portraits of their prized animals.

This exceptionally beautiful and delicately worked gold cup has had an illustrious history. The cup was presented in 1874 to John Tait, the owner of McCallum Mohr, the winner of that year's race. The cup remained with the Tait family until 1980, and subsequent owners of this remarkable object have included antiques specialist John B Hawkins, and media figures Kerry Packer and Trevor Kennedy. In 1994, industrialist Peter Simon purchased the cup for his wife Ruth to celebrate their 50th or 'golden' wedding anniversary, hence the small inscribed plaque on the hardwood base.

Director & CEO of Geelong Gallery, **Jason Smith** says "The return of *The 1874 Geelong Gold Cup* to Geelong is a significant moment in this Gallery's collection history. We are indebted to the Dorothy McAllister Bequest Fund for this major acquisition and for the financial assistance provided by the Geelong Racing Club. We look forward to sharing this important treasure with the community."

The 1874 Geelong Cup can be viewed at Geelong Gallery from Tuesday 30 April 2019.



Edward FISCHER
Born Austria 1828; arrived in Australia 1853; died 1911
Frederick WOODHOUSE (designer)
The 1874 Geelong Gold Cup
Gold and hardwood; 597 gms, 24 cm high, 32 cm high with base
Purchased through the Dorothy McAllister Bequest Fund with the assistance of
the Geelong Racing Club, 2018

Background information (provided by Sotheby's Australia)

Author: Guy Cairnduff

The 1874 Geelong Gold Cup was purchased by Mr JB Hawkins from Miss Tait in 1980. Then living in Moss Vale, New South Wales, she was the grand-daughter of Mr John Tait (1813–1888), a race horse owner, trainer, and the owner of McCallum Mohr, who won the Geelong Cup on 6 February 1874.

John Tait was born on 5 November 1813 at Melrose, near Edinburgh. Trained as a jeweller, he arrived in Hobart on 2 November 1837 and opened a jewellery business. Moving to New South Wales in June 1843, he was to take over the Black Bull Inn in Bathurst in 1847. Tait won the New South Wales St Leger horse race at Homebush three times, the first in 1847, and the Queens Plate, in Victoria, three times. Moving to Sydney in 1853, he became the licensee of the Commercial Hotel in Castlereagh Street.

In 1857 Tait adopted his famous racing colours of a yellow jacket and a black cap and he went into horse racing as a business. His most famous horse was 'The Barb' or 'Black Demon', who won for him the Melbourne Cup in 1866 and the Sydney Cups in 1868 and 1869. He won the Melbourne Cup three times and it is estimated that by 1880, 'Honest John' Tait had won over £30,000 in prize money.

The Geelong Advertiser of 1873 states '*making of the Geelong Racing Club 100 sovereign gold cup, has been entrusted to Mr Fischer, in design it will be quite different to anything made here before, being of oval shape on an elegantly chased stem, the two handles following the contour of the bowl, the lid will be surmounted by a horse rampant, signed by Mr F Woodhouse, the height will be fully nine inches and the weight not less than 20 ounces. A more elegant trophy could not have been desired.*' ⁽¹⁾

Edward Fischer was responsible for the manufacture of eighteen Geelong Cup trophies, from 1873 to 1890. Only five of these trophies, including the present example, are known to exist. ⁽²⁾

According to JB Hawkins, after purchasing the cup from Miss Tait in 1980 he then sold it to the late media magnate, Mr Kerry Packer, in 1981. Mr Hawkins later re-purchased the cup from Mr Packer and in 1988 sold it to Koopman Rareart, London, obtaining an Export Licence approved by the Movable Cultural Heritage Authorities to allow it to be shipped to London. The cup was subsequently acquired by Mr Peter Simon and given to his wife, Mrs Ruth Simon, as a gift commemorating their Golden Wedding anniversary on 20 May 1994—this is denoted by the inscription on the later hardwood base which accompanies the cup. *The 1874 Geelong Gold cup* was acquired from Mrs Ruth Simon by Mr Trevor Kennedy, and formed part of The Kennedy Collection of Australian decorative arts and historical artefacts.

(1) Geelong Advertiser, Geelong, 20 November 1873, p. 2.

(2) J.B. Hawkins, 'Australian Goldsmiths' Work, 1834–1950', World of Antiques and Art, no. 60, Sydney, December 1999–June 2000, pp.12–17

Additional Geelong Gold Cups by Edward Fischer (location known)

- 1878 Geelong Gold Cup, Edward Fischer, won by Newminster, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1879 Geelong Gold Cup, 15ct gold, Edward Fischer, won by Lord Harry, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. The O'Loughlin Gift: a memorial to Martin Loughlin (1833–1894), miner, sportsman and philanthropist. Gift of three of his great-nieces, 1994
- 1880 Geelong Gold Cup, 18ct gold, Edward Fischer, won by Zambesi, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, 1976
- 1890 Geelong Gold Cup, 18ct gold, Edward Fischer, won by Britannia, Geelong Gallery, Geelong. Purchased through the Dorothy McAllister Bequest Fund with the assistance of the Geelong Racing Club, 1996

The 1890 Geelong Gold Cup also currently on display - is the last in the series of eighteen gold cups made by Fischer in his Geelong workshop for the Geelong Racing Club's annual Geelong Cup races.

After the submission of various design options, this 1890 trophy crafted by Fisher has a cup-shaped bowl standing on a beaded and engraved central column. The lid is surmounted by a cast horse and jockey finial standing on a small circle of turf. The mounted horse is most likely to have been conceived after sketches by highly-regarded equine artist Frederick Woodhouse (1820–1909).

The 1890 Geelong Gold Cup was won by 'Britannia', trained by CJ Nicholls and ridden by E Power.

This 1890 Cup marked the end of the long association between the Geelong Racing Club and Fischer. Towards the end of that year, he announced his retirement and, in 1891, sold his business before moving to Melbourne.