

TIRRANNA PICNIC RACES CHALLENGE CUP

The Tirranna Picnic Races Challenge Cup was awarded for the main race at the Tirranna Picnic Races, which were established outside Goulburn, New South Wales, in 1855. This ornate and finely crafted gold cup was first presented in 1895.

The cup was made by Hardy Brothers, already a well-established jeweller in both Sydney and Brisbane in the 1880s. The name 'Hardy Bros' is engraved on the cup but sadly Hardy Brothers today has no information on the maker or designer of the cup.

From the early days of colonisation, picnic races have been a feature of rural life. Country people travelled long distances to these annual gatherings, some of which continued for several days and were accompanied by wild celebrations. However, not everyone came to enjoy the carnival atmosphere. The country race meetings that were the main attraction on the social calendar were also popular with bushrangers, who would identify the fastest horses and then try to steal them, often successfully.

In 1872, the railway from Sydney reached Goulburn, making the Tirranna Picnic Races more accessible to Sydney racing enthusiasts. In the 1890s, the Governor would drive from Goulburn to Tirranna, escorted by aides and equerries and a military band. He attended the races along with enthusiasts and people of influence and the meeting was widely reported in the Sydney press, as were the fashionable gowns worn at the associated balls and dances.

The Tirranna Picnic Races Challenge Cup was awarded annually. David Innes Watt first won the trophy in 1899 with his horse Loch Leven, in 1904 with Chiefswood, and again in 1906 with Pleasure. With his third win he earned the right to retain the cup.

Mr David Innes Watt was born at Murrurundi in 1855. He was a keen sportsman with a great interest in amateur racing and was a President of the Coonabarabran Amateur Race Club. He was a member of the Binnaway Rifle Club, Cricket Club and the

Weetalabah polo team, and he owned several polo ponies as well as racehorses. David Innes Watt also served as a member of the Shire Council and the Pastures Protection Board.

Horseracing, 'The Sport of Kings' is also a universal sport, colourful and down-to-earth. Its popularity continues to this day with extraordinary sums of money won and lost at the racecourse. This beautiful gold cup provides material evidence of the enormous popularity and social standing of horse racing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The cup was donated to the National Museum of Australia by John Norman Watt and his daughter Pixie on behalf of the David Innes Watt family. 🐾

Pip McNaught, Curator, Land Program

