

# Tin Cup racing's

## 'Missing' trophy in vault

Matt Stewart

PERCHED behind glass to the right of a stewards' tower crammed with men in hats, the 1910 Melbourne Cup trophy was on full display as the field thundered by.

Plonked inches from the outside running rail, it was almost within grasp as "Midge" McLachlan and Comedy King swept to a narrow victory from Trafalgar in front of a crowd of about 100,000.

Given its full-view status 100 years ago, it was ironic that the magnificent tin cup, the one commemorating the 50th running of the Melbourne Cup, disappeared almost the moment legendary racing figure Sol Green tucked it under his arm and left the course.

The 1910 Melbourne Cup trophy, far more ornate than the better-known loving cup of today, will make its first public appearance in a century when it emerges from a Melbourne bank vault to play a role in this year's 150th Melbourne Cup celebrations.

When the dust settles on this very special edition of our famous race, the trophy claimed by the first imported winner of the race — and sire of two subsequent winners — who was owned by legendary philanthropist Sol Green and ridden by leading trainer Lee Freedman's great grandfather, will be on display at the MCG's National Sports Museum.

It's been a nomadic, century-long journey for Sol Green's Cup, one of few consigned to the category of "present location unknown" by VRC historian Andrew Lemon — until now.

Before spending the last 20 years in its mysterious vault, the Cup bobbed up on a mantelpiece at the sprawling Green holiday home in Sorrento, at the family home in Beaconsfield Pde, St Kilda, and later behind glass at the home of Green's son, Robert, in Lerderberg St, Bacchus Marsh.

Green's grandson, Robert, who is more interested in ski slopes than tin cups, took possession of Comedy King's Cup about 20 years ago.

Robert, 70, knew right away it had immense family value, but only after a trip to Kozminsky's silverware shop in the city to insure it, did he realise that its value was more than sentimental.

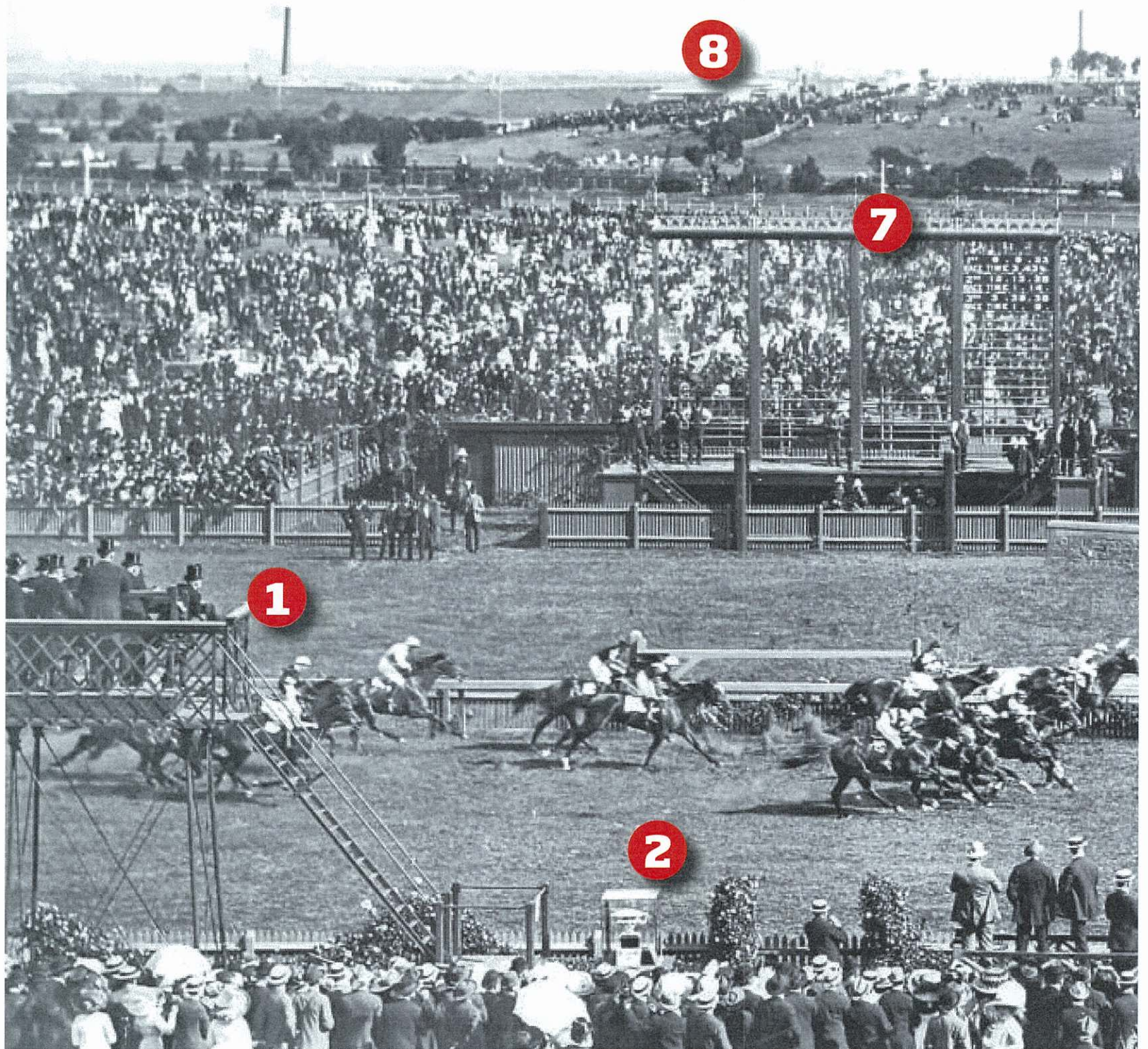
"It was very, very valuable, let's just say that," Green said.

So valuable that Green could not afford to plonk it permanently in his Toorak lounge room, where its unique silhouette might have been irresistible to passers-by with light fingers.

"We've had a break-in here before," he said. "These days you can't leave anything this valuable sitting about."

Even, as has often been the case in the last century, when disguised as a rather grand flower pot.

The 1910 Cup's long and intriguing history was evident when Green revealed it to the *Herald Sun* and very interested Emma Freedman last week. Comedy King's jockey, Bill "Midge"



McLachlan, rode three Cup winners, a family tally topped many decades later by his grandson, five-time Melbourne Cup-winning trainer, Lee Freedman.

"It's amazing to actually see the trophy. It's 100 years old, it pre-dates us all by so long. My great grandfather is obviously a legendary figure in the family. He was also the first Australian jockey to ride for The Queen," Ms Freedman said.

Green said he was too young to remember much about the Cup in its days on display at Sorrento and St Kilda.

"All I remember is that it was always filled with flowers," he said.

Other than running a book at university, Robert Green, who became a sports gear wholesaler, did not follow in the legendary footsteps of his grandfather, who was a book-maker, revered racehorse owner and philanthropist.

"I'm more into skiing, I'm afraid," he said, adding he remembered one piece of advice from his late grand-

father. "He said the only way to make money from horses was to follow them around with a shovel and a wheelbarrow."

Green is thrilled that a trophy that so defined his family history is about to resurface for such a significant edition of the great race.

More thrilled, however, was Victoria Racing Club events marketing manager, Joe McGrath.

"He almost fell off his chair when I told him I had it," Green said.

McGrath said he was amazed that a trophy of such significance had come to light. "It's absolutely priceless. There is so much significance to Comedy King, as the first imported winner (he was imported at foot to his mother), the trailblazer to horses like Vintage Crop," McGrath said.

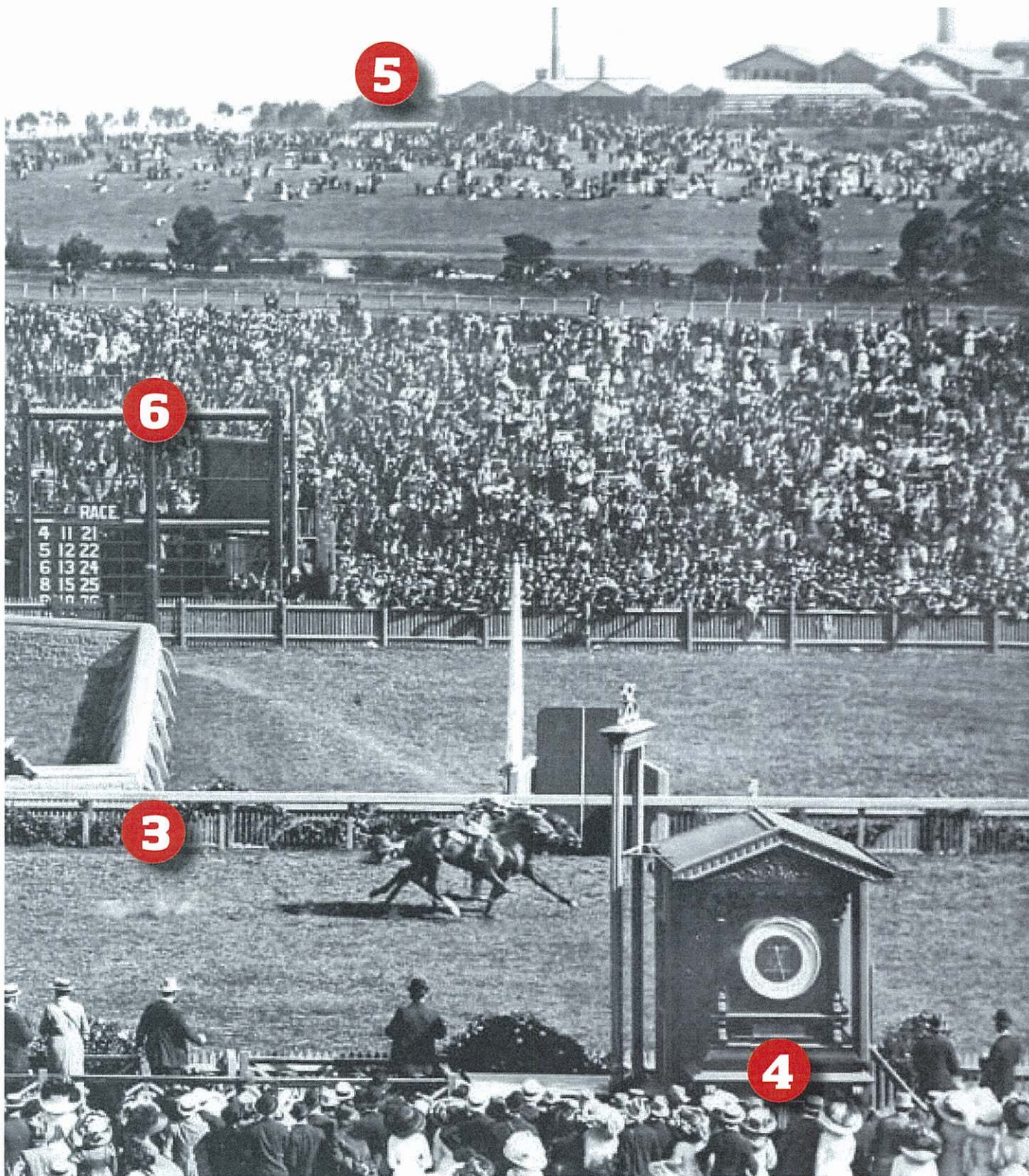
"It was also the 50th Cup, a landmark Cup. We're absolutely thrilled that it's surfaced."



Rare airing: Robert Green, grandson of Comedy King's owner Sol Green, and Emma Freedman with the 1910 Melbourne Cup trophy. Picture: CRAIG BORROW

F B 1 2 3 C M Y K DHS 26-JUL-2010 PAGE 64 FIRST

# priceless relic



## MOMENT IN TIME

The running of the 50th Melbourne Cup at Flemington in 1910.

**1** Stewards tower. Back then the VRC committee acted as honorary stewards.

**2** Melbourne Cup displayed in glass case. It was a tradition in the early 20th century to put the Cup on public show.

**3** Stonewall fence on the hurdle/steeplechase track, which was inside the course proper.

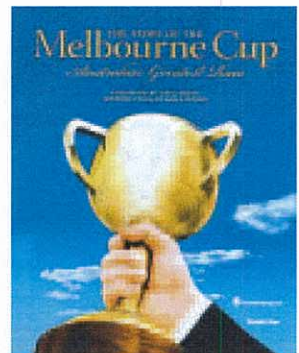
**4** Chronograph clock, first used in the 1870s. Used to time races. It now resides in the VRC Committee Room.

**5** Scotchman's Hill where punters watched the Melbourne Cup.

**6** Semaphore board where scratchings were listed.

**7** Semaphore board where jockeys for each horse were posted as well as previous race results.

**8** Pioneer Hotel. Broadcaster Eric Welsh once called a dead-heat from the loft of the hotel. Broadcasters were banned from the course until 1945.



*THE Story of The Melbourne Cup, Australia's Greatest Race* has provided — for the first time — a complete picture of what it takes to create, maintain and ultimately grow a two-mile handicap into an international phenomenon.

This book is not the story of 149 races, it's the story of how it began, who created it, how it evolved — organically — and then how quality administration gave it the kick it needed when it started to lose its relevance in the early '80s.

The book pays tribute to the pioneers, the original committee that had the courage to create Melbourne's feature race as a handicap, and the geniuses whose understanding of the thoroughbred have immortalised them in the history of the Cup.

There's only one Bart Cummings in the book, but between the thousands of lines in its 300-plus pages, there are millions of dreamers who have wished they could lead in the winner of this iconic event — just once, would be enough, not Cummings' baker's dozen! The dream will continue as the race grows as an international event drawing the best of the best.

The book has always been an important part of the VRC's strategy to promote the 150th running of the Melbourne Cup. It was a fundamental of the creative and publishing process that the race needed to be explained in the context of history and the constancy of attitudinal change and how such affected society and ultimately the way the race was presented.

It's something of a myth that Australia's great race was created as a handicap giving any battler the opportunity to win it, but it sits neatly into the total story of the race. 'Good' myths will do that.

*The Story of The Melbourne Cup, Australia's Greatest Race.* Edited by Stephen Howell. Published by The Slattery Media Group.

On sale July 28. RRP: \$99.95.

GEOFF SLATTERY

## Home for restless trophy Skipping race pays off

FEW Melbourne Cup trophies have travelled a road as rugged as the trophy won by Malvolio in 1891.

Malvolio's win was a Redfean family triumph. The horse's owner, breeder and trainer was James Redfean and his son George was the jockey.

George went on to train horses in Singapore and he displayed the cherished 1891 trophy prominently in the family house, Westways, where he lived with his wife Dulcie. Their daughter, also Dulcie, married Edward Laidlaw-Thomson, a Scot who was a doctor in Singapore in the 1930s. They had a daughter, Hilary, in July 1939.

World War II intervened. A Japanese invasion of Singapore appeared certain. The Cup had to be left behind as the family relocated.

George and Dulcie Redfean packed the silver trophy, the

### THE SURVIVOR

Victorian table on which it was displayed, and a portrait of Malvolio in its frame and put them in a locked cupboard. They sailed for Durban.

Their daughter and granddaughter returned to Australia, where Laidlaw-Thomson later joined them and organised for the family to sail to Scotland.

Japan invaded Singapore in 1942 and the survival of Malvolio's trophy was left to chance. George Redfean died that year and Dulcie moved to Scotland to live with her daughter.

Laidlaw-Thomson returned to Singapore in 1945 as a Surgeon-Commander and a member of Lord Mountbatten's staff reclaiming the country. After landing, he

returned to Westways. He must have been astounded to see the only furniture in the house was Malvolio's trophy on its stand. The painting had been cut from its frame, slashed and tossed in a corner, but was in good enough condition to salvage. The story of Laidlaw-Thomson's amazing discovery was reported in *The Times* in London. It was only when his wife and mother-in-law saw the article that they knew he was safe.

Laidlaw-Thomson moved to the Bahamas to run a medical clinic and the family took the Cup, as they did, too, on their return to England, where they settled in Berkshire.

The trophy was on display at Dulcie Laidlaw-Thomson's Kintbury home in England when the family sold it to the VRC in 2003.

WHEN Skipton won the Melbourne Cup in 1941 the colt's owner, Myrtle Kitson, was working at the family's Grand Central Hotel at Hamilton, in the Western District.

Kitson believed her presence at the track would curse the horse's chances of winning the Victoria Derby and the Cup, so it was her husband Jack and daughter Morva who headed off to Flemington.

After Skipton won the Derby on the Saturday, Jack Kitson, confident of winning the Cup, suggested his wife join him, but she stood firm and again declined to make the trip.

Jack and Morva stood under umbrellas in the rain to accept the trophy on behalf of the third female owner of a Cup winner. Skipton was the 23rd and most recent three-year-old to win the Cup.

Hamilton officially celebrated Skipton's win eight

### THE TRADITION

days after the race with a civic function at the Grand Central, where the Cup took pride of place in the dining room.

It was then put on view in the windows of jeweller R.P. Rizzo and the local newspaper reported hundreds gathered to see it. A film of the race was also shown at Hamilton's Regent Theatre.

After Myrtle died in 1946 the Kitsons moved to Melbourne and the Cup was held in safe-keeping at the ES&A Bank, corner of Glenferrie Rd and High St, Malvern. Every year, as the first Tuesday in November approached, Jack Kitson would retrieve the Cup to display it in his nearby family home nearby.

Jack died on Boxing Day 1962, but Morva McCormack

(nee Kitson) maintained the tradition at the home in Malvern until she moved in 1974. Skipton's name is inscribed on the High St house's wrought iron gates.

In 1984, Morva decided to sell the Cup and it was put up for auction at the Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne. Keith Dibb, a successful businessman and racehorse owner, was driving home when he heard on the radio that the Cup was going under the hammer.

He dropped by the hotel, telling himself that if he couldn't find a park he would keep driving. He got lucky with a space and soon made a successful \$22,000 bid for the Cup.

Dibb stored the Cup alongside trophies he won as a horse owner, including the 1965 Cox Plate (Star Affair) and 1970 Australian Cup (Crewman).