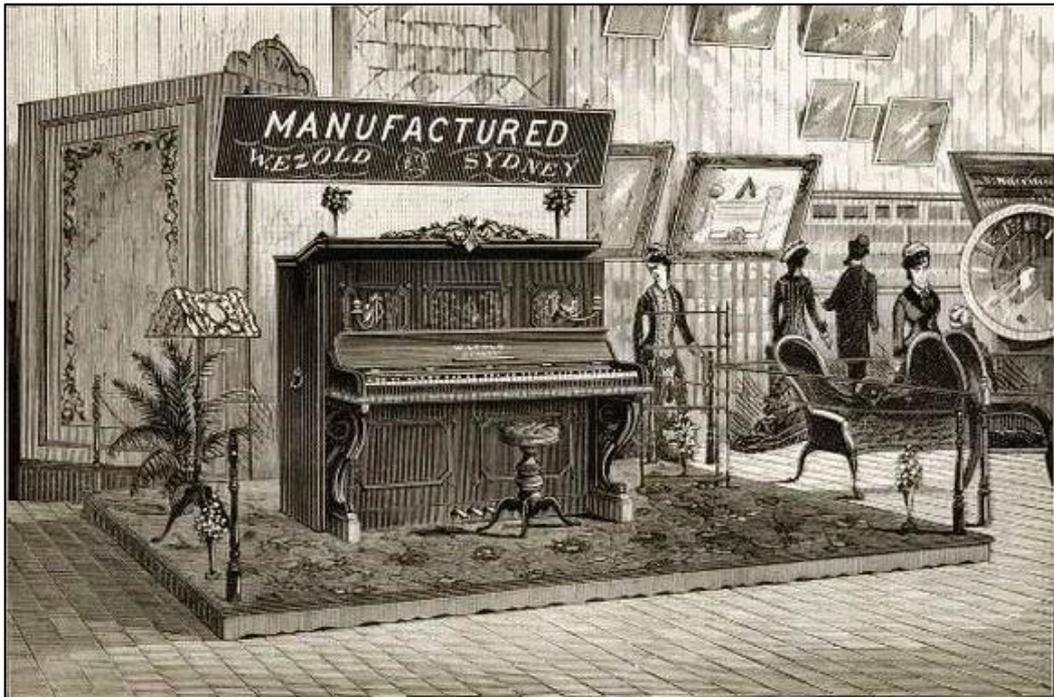


Making the music – Sydney piano manufacturing history



John W. Ross

Cover photograph:

William Ezold's piano at the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition, 1879 (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 20 December 1879)

Australian attitudes to the arts:

“Australians reserve their highest admiration for sportsmen and women, followed by entertainers and actors. Political leaders appear well down the scale of public affection, and it is further still before one encounters any artists, musicians or writers”.

(Art critic John McDonald, *Federation Arts and Society 1901-2002*, National Gallery of Australia, 2000)

As for piano manufacturers:

“Piano makers and professional concert pianists are rarely mentioned, nor consistently celebrated”.

(Geoffrey Lancaster, *The First Fleet Piano: A musician's View, Volume One*).

On the other hand:

“The Australians are a very musical people, and in Sydney particularly ... it is not inappropriate to call Sydney the ‘City of Pianos’”.

(Francis Campbell Brewer, *The Drama and Music in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1892).

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Foreword

Pianos have been in Australia from the beginning of European settlement when the surgeon George Worgan carried his small wooden-framed piano with him in the First Fleet. He taught Elizabeth Macarthur to play it before leaving it with her on his departure a few years later. Pianos were then imported into the colony until John Benham manufactured his first one using local timbers in 1835. William King imported English Broadwood pianos from the 1850s and also assembled them from imported parts. Piano manufacturing developed slowly from that time.

Australian settlers took to the piano with enthusiasm during the nineteenth century, partly as entertainment and solace in very isolated settlements, and partly as a symbol of middle class gentility and prosperity. Some 700,000 pianos were imported into Australia during that century, gracing almost every school, church hall, pub, hospital and mining camp. It was mostly girls that learned to play the family piano as part of their education in the social graces.

The piano manufacturing industry in Sydney received a major boost from the Intercolonial Exhibitions of the 1870s and early 1880s, with the prize-winning upright piano made for local conditions by William Ezold gaining widespread attention. Some sixty international piano manufacturers exhibited their instruments at the 1879 exhibition, including Steinway and Bechstein, resulting in a boom in piano sales.

Octavius Beale became the dominant piano manufacturer in Sydney from the 1890s, producing some 95,000 pianos until finally closing in the 1960s. Challenges to piano manufacturing appeared during Beale's time, starting with the popularity of player pianos from 1900 to 1930, and the start of radio broadcasting in the 1920s. Both of these reduced the demand for piano instruction, but despite this more than half of all pianos exported from the USA in the 1920s were shipped to Australia.

The economic Depression of the early 1930s, manufacturing restrictions during World War II, the introduction of television in the 1950s and cheap post-war Japanese imports effectively killed off the local piano manufacturing industry. The only manufacturer to weather the immediate post-war period was Charles Davies, who ran a smaller operation than Beale and who was persuaded to copy Yamaha's smaller spinet pianos to remain competitive until the late 1970s.

Every pianist needs music to play, and the sheet music importing and manufacturing industry grew along with the volume of pianos imported or made in the colony. Popular sheet music by London publishers was shipped to Australia in large numbers from the 1830s. The Novello Company in England pioneered the growth of cheap printed music in the colony, and before long Sydney music printers were pirating imported titles for local sale. The earliest Australian compositions were printed in England before local music publishing was established in the 1830s.

Francis Ellard was the first significant music publisher and printer in Sydney from 1835. Prominent music publishers from the gold-rush era of the 1850s were Jacob Clarke, William Woolcott, and Henry Marsh. Marsh in particular typified the nineteenth century music publisher as an active participant in the musical life of Sydney, being an accomplished pianist, composer, conductor, music publisher and promoter of grand concerts.

William Paling became a major publisher of popular dance music in the 1870s with a series of albums featuring polkas, waltzes, marches, and Christmas songs. The latter album was produced in numbered editions from about 1871 to the start of World War II. James Nicholson was also a major music publisher from the 1870s to the 1930s. The last important Sydney music publisher was J. Albert & Co, encompassing three generations of the Albert family from Jacques in the 1880s to grandson Ted during the resurgence of Australian pop music in the 1960s and 1970s.

Lastly, my family's piano is documented in detail, as possibly a typical budget-priced domestic piano from the 1950s that was made to the retailer's specifications in order to withstand the Queensland heat and humidity. After more than fifty years of service, the piano became uneconomic to keep in good repair, but it continues its useful life as a computer desk and a reminder of times gone by.

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Development of the piano

Precursor keyboard instruments

A keyboard instrument is any musical instrument on which different notes can be sounded by pressing a set of keys, push buttons or parallel levers. In Western music, the keys usually correspond to consecutive notes in the chromatic scale, running from the bass on the left to treble on the right.

This large group of instruments has achieved great importance because a performer can play many notes at once and at a high speed. This versatility enables a modern pianist or organist to play transcriptions of any of the works of Western music, including those with chordal harmonies and independent counterpoint parts.

Pipe organ

The keyboard was first developed and applied to the organ. A keyboard of the type familiar today first appeared on the hydraulis, a mechanical pipe organ probably invented in Alexandria in the third century BC, which used a water cistern to maintain a steady air pressure to the pipes. This type of keyboard apparently disappeared after the fall of the Roman Empire, and organs of the early Middle Ages generally had sliders that were pulled out to sound different notes, or had keys that turned like a key in a lock.

A keyboard resembling the modern type existed in the fourteenth century, although the arrangement of natural and accidental keys (the white and black keys respectively on a modern piano) was only gradually standardised. The present arrangement of five raised keys and seven natural keys became standard by the fifteenth century.

Clavichord

The earliest known reference to a keyboard instrument using strings dates from 1360 when such an instrument (known as an eschiquier) was mentioned in account books of John II, King of France, but its method of sounding the strings was not described. The clavichord seems to be the earliest stringed instrument having keys that could be pushed down by the fingers. The name first appeared in a German document from 1404.



Figure 1 Fretted clavichord (Wikimedia)

A clavichord is rectangular and its strings run from left to right across the keys, which are placed along one of the longer sides of the rectangle. A brass blade like the end of a screwdriver is driven into the top of each key and a similar piece of wood, whalebone or horn is driven into the back of the key, which fits into a fixed slot to prevent sideways movement as it moves up and down.

When the front of the key is pressed down by the player's finger, the back end rises and the brass blade strikes a pair of strings, causing them to vibrate. When the key is released, a strip of cloth woven between the strings silences the sound. Because only the segment of the strings between the blade and the bridge is sounded, blades placed at different points below the strings produce a different note. This positioning is taken advantage of to produce a much greater number of notes than the number of pairs of strings.

The disadvantage of the multi-note feature of each string is that playing certain chords is impossible, and successive notes on the same string produces an unpleasant clanking sound. Over time, it was felt that these restrictions should be removed, and clavichords were eventually developed with one pair of strings for each key. The oldest existing example of this instrument was built by Hieronymus Hass of Hamburg in 1724.

The greatest disadvantage of the clavichord was its very soft tone. Because it arises from the way the sound is produced, it is not readily overcome, but the volume of the sound can be controlled within these limitations. Despite its unsuitability to the concert hall or in ensemble music, the clavichord was highly valued as a teaching and practice instrument. This, and its relative cheapness, made it the normal household keyboard instrument in much of Europe.

Harpsichord

The sound of the harpsichord and its relatives, the spinet and the virginal, is produced by plucking their strings. The plucking mechanism is a narrow slip of wood with two slots cut into the top that rests on the key. The larger slot holds a quill, plastic or leather plectrum that performs the plucking. The smaller slot holds a piece of cloth that rests on the string and silences it when the key is not pressed.



Figure 2 Dutch harpsichord 1612 (Britannica.com)

When the player pushes down a key, the back end rises and forces the plectrum past the string, plucking it. When the key is released, the plectrum falls past the string without touching it and the cloth damper touches the string, silencing it. Although slight differences in volume and timbre can be produced by different pressure on the keys, significant volume and tone variations are only possible with multiple strings (and plectra) per note. But rapid changes in volume, or a different volume for the two hands, were not normally possible without more complex instruments.

Although many fine harpsichords were made after 1750, few renowned composers were writing for it by that time. The emergence of a newer, lighter style of music and an interest in crescendo and decrescendo effects led to new contraptions operated by the knee or foot designed to produce rapid changes in volume. Harpsichords continued to be made alongside pianos for some time. John Broadwood made a decreasing number of harpsichords until after 1800, while producing an ever-increasing number of pianos. A small group of compositions at the time even called for both instruments.

Invention and development of the piano

The long development of the harpsichord showed instrument builders the best way to construct the various parts of a keyboard instrument intended to sound strings. Although the basic principles of the piano's operation are simple, the refinements required to develop the powerful but sensitive modern piano make it the most complex of musical instruments, apart from the organ. The number of parts usually quoted is up to about 12,000¹. The strings of a piano are struck by a felt-covered hammer that must rebound from the strings instantaneously or it will dampen their vibrations in the act of causing them.



Figure 3 Bartolomeo Cristofori (Soulful Pianist Facebook)

Unsophisticated piano mechanisms were devised and built throughout the eighteenth century. But the first successful piano was made in Italy by Bartolomeo Cristofori, who solved the problems inherent in the previous simple mechanisms, as well as nearly every other problem facing piano builders until well into the nineteenth century. Cristofori reportedly experimented with a “harpsichord with hammers” in 1698. By 1700, one of these instruments was included in the

inventory of instruments belonging to the Medici family in Florence. An Italian newspaper described it as a “harpsichord with soft and loud”, from which come the modern names pianoforte and piano.

The feature at the heart of Cristofori’s invention was called an escapement, in which the depressed key lifts an intermediate lever which in turn pushes upward on the hammer shaft which strikes the string. Then, when the key is pressed completely down, the jack (a pivoted piece of wood set into the key) disengages itself from the intermediate lever which then falls back, permitting the hammer to return to its resting position, even while the key is still depressed.

Using an intermediate lever on the hammer near one end of its shaft provides a great velocity advantage, and the hammer flies towards the string much faster than the key depresses under the pianist’s finger, adding to the crispness and sensitivity of Cristofori’s innovative mechanism. Cristofori had few immediate successors in Italy, but when word of his invention reached Germany in 1725, keyboard instrument makers such as Gottfried Silbermann began constructing pianos in the 1730s that were based on Cristofori’s.

Silberman showed Johann Sebastian Bach an early piano in 1736, but Bach said the high notes were too soft to allow a full dynamic range. However, Bach did approve an improved instrument in 1747, and even served as an agent for selling Silbermann’s pianos. Bach wrote his 48 preludes and fugues in two batches, in the 1720s then in the 1740s, but they were written for harpsichord.

German builders devised actions and adapted them then to clavichord-shaped instruments that are now called “square pianos”. But many German pianos lacked an escapement, as mentioned by Mozart in a letter to his father in 1777. Johann Stein devised the first German action to include an escapement, and this was used by all the important eighteenth and early-nineteenth century piano makers in Vienna. Mozart composed his sonatas and piano concertos on such an instrument, which had a softer tone than modern pianos, with less sustaining power.

The modern piano

Like eighteenth century harpsichords, pianos of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were constructed entirely of wood, with the case (supported by internal wooden braces) sustaining entirely the stress exerted by the strings. With ever-increasing tension being applied to the strings, increasing quantities of metal bracing came into use, culminating in a massive cast iron frame that took the entire tension of the strings.

From 1790 to 1860, the piano underwent tremendous changes that led to the modern instrument. This was in response to a preference by composers and pianists for a more powerful sustained sound. It was made possible by the Industrial Revolution when advances in metallurgy allowed the manufacture of high quality piano wire for strings and precision casting for heavy iron frames.

The one-piece iron frame was first used in square pianos in Boston in 1825 and in grand pianos in 1843. In modern instruments, the frame bears a total tension of some eighteen tons. Overstringing, in which it was realised that the bass strings could be made longer and their tone improved if they were made to fan out over the treble strings, was first built into a grand piano by Steinway & Sons in 1855.

Over time, the five octaves of Mozart’s day were increased to the seven octaves of today. The firm of John Broadwood & Sons was responsible for much of the technological progress in the late 1700s.

They sent pianos to Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven, and were the first to expand the range beyond five octaves. Beethoven used the extra notes of the six-octave piano in his later works.

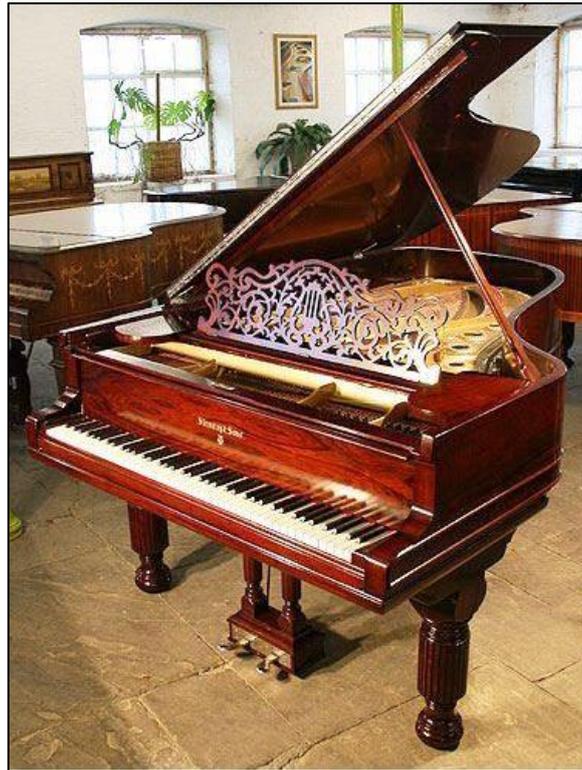


Figure 4 Steinway grand piano 1884 (Bestrode Pianos)

With the adoption of the one-piece cast frame, overstringing and felt hammers, the piano achieved its modern form, apart from a few details. The use of three strings rather than two for all but the lowest notes enhanced the richness and complexity of the treble. Two pedals had been in use, in which the right pedal sustains the notes by keeping the dampeners from touching the strings, and a soft left pedal, which moved the hammers closer to the strings for a quieter sound. A middle pedal was invented in 1862 to keep the dampeners off the strings only for notes already held down, rather than for all notes at once.

Since the abandonment of the square piano, only upright and grand pianos are regularly manufactured now. Grand pianos range in size from baby to concert grands. Among upright pianos, the models over 120cm tall have largely been superseded by lower models, in particular the spinet (about 90cm tall).

Pioneering colonial manufacturers

The First Fleet piano

George Worgan, surgeon and pianist

The first piano to be brought to Australia was a small rectangular instrument, known as a square piano, by George Bouchier Worgan (1757-1838), the surgeon aboard the *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet. George Worgan's father Doctor John Worgan (1724-1790) was an eminent virtuoso organist and composer. George joined the British Navy at age 18 after his father had determined that he pursue a career in medicine, even though George wanted to study and pursue agriculture.

He was gazetted as a naval surgeon in 1780, and then in 1786 he was discharged to the *Sirius*, which was scheduled to travel to Botany Bay. Three surgeons were assigned to the *Sirius*: George Bouchier Worgan was the senior surgeon, Thomas Jamison was the Surgeon's First Mate and John Lowes was Surgeon's Mate. Worgan was among the twelve surgeons appointed at the public expense to go to Botany Bay.

At that time, physicians were university educated, but surgeons were apprenticed. Physicians were only permitted to examine patients, diagnose disease and prescribe medicines. Much of this at the time was groping in the dark, acting by guess and conjecture and often depending on chance and the strength of the patient's constitution for recovery. Physicians typically formed a diagnosis without actually touching the patient. Even as late as 1850, physicians were content to inquire about previous illnesses and current appetite, feel the pulse and observe the appearance of the eyes, tongue, urine and faeces in that order of interest². They were not permitted to act as surgeons.

Unlike physicians, surgeons performed operations, set broken bones and treated accident cases and skin disorders. A surgeon differed from a physician in that he had to cut, manipulate and treat disorders on the outside of the body. A surgeon was considered a skilled craftsman whose work demanded speed, dexterity and physical strength as well as expertise³. The archetypal surgeon was muscular and practical, who did not mind blood and gore, and was handy with a saw, knife and stitching needle. It was said he should have a lion's heart, a hawk's eye and a lady's hand.

Surgery in the 18th century was performed without anaesthetic or antiseptic. Operations were usually only undertaken to save a life that would clearly otherwise be lost. The general perception of physicians was that they were much "cleaner" and "nicer" than surgeons, even though they were much less effective. Surgeons did not enjoy the status given to physicians, being frequently satirised as "sawbones".

The colony's first piano

George Worgan's piano survived the often-stormy trip from England to New South Wales intact, and during the trip he played it for his fellow officers while the fleet was resupplying in Rio de Janeiro harbour. The stores from the First Fleet ships took weeks to unload in Sydney Cove, as accommodation tents and buildings were gradually constructed. It appears that Worgan's piano was located in a tent as late as May 1788⁴.

At Sydney Cove, music was an indispensable part of the fledgling colony's creative life. English values had been transplanted to the antipodes and music was an intrinsic part of these values. Playing the

piano was one of the talents exhibited by women of good taste. The piano was highly integrated into family and community life. A governess, who took on the responsibility for educating the children in a genteel household, would initially give piano lessons. When the young student had mastered the rudiments of piano playing, a professional musician was employed to visit the student's home to give more lessons.



Figure 5 Frederick Beck piano (Stewart Symonds collection)

Elizabeth Macarthur, pioneer and piano student

After George Worgan arrived in the colony, the piano followed him everywhere until he placed it in the care of Elizabeth Macarthur in January 1791. She was born Elizabeth Veale in Devon in 1766, where her father was a yeoman farmer who owned a mixed farm of some 94 acres. After her father died and her mother remarried, she went to live with her grandfather at the age of six. Soon afterwards she went to the home of the Reverend John Kingdon where she was educated along with his daughter Bridget. Bridget became a lifelong friend and correspondent. Elizabeth was a “charity child” or poor relation, and it was relatively common in Georgian England to act as an unpaid companion to an ailing wife or daughter.



Figure 6 Longman & Broderip piano (Brian Barrow)

Elizabeth was luckier than others in her position, because the Reverend Kingdon treated her as his own daughter. She received an excellent education at a time when most genteel girls were only taught reading, writing, sewing and needlework, plus some French and arithmetic. She was taught

Latin and Greek, studied ancient and modern history, geography, natural history and elementary French⁵.

When John Macarthur first met Elizabeth, he was a young ensign from a disbanded Corps of Foot on half pay. As one of fourteen children of a Plymouth mercer and draper, he had few prospects, no fortune, and only his own sense of superiority to support him while endeavouring to obtain another post in the five years after the American War of Independence. She became pregnant to him before they were married in October 1789. Neither John's father nor Elizabeth's mother approved of the marriage, but the Reverend Kingdon did approve of their relationship. In June 1789, John transferred to the 102nd Regiment, the newly created New South Wales Corps, which was then being scheduled for duty at Botany Bay.

In January 1790, the Macarthurs left England for Sydney Cove in the notorious Second Fleet. Conditions on board were terrible, and John demanded that his family be transferred from the *Neptune* to another ship of the fleet while they were becalmed in the doldrums. They were shifted over to the *Scarborough*, where they could enjoy fresh air on deck. They arrived at Sydney Cove in June 1790.

Elizabeth was the second women of her social class to arrive in Sydney Cove, the other being the wife of the Reverend Richard Johnson, about whom almost nothing is known. With no other women in the colony other than convicts and servants, Elizabeth formed friendships with some of the officers, in particular with the perceptive author Captain Watkin Tench and the amateur astronomer and anthropologist Lieutenant William Dawes⁶.

Her desire for stimulating company probably resulted in her meeting George Worgan and his piano. When the Macarthurs moved into a newly-constructed and thatched wattle-and daub hut six months after their arrival, George Worgan moved his piano into their hut. It is not known if this was because it would be kept in better conditions than his own primitive officer's hut, or his close friendship with Elizabeth. But the presence of the colony's only piano in the Macarthurs' hut would have lent them considerable social prestige.

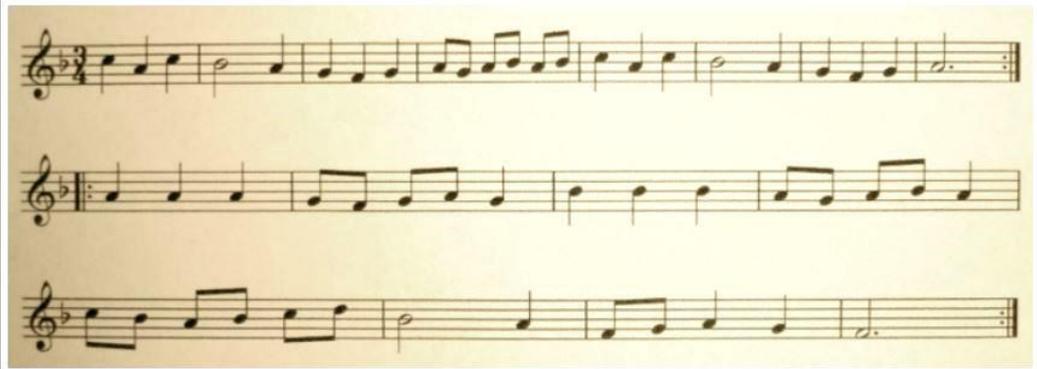


Plate 70 'Foot's Minuet'.
Source: Transposed by the author from P. J. Perry, *Bass Recorder Solos No. 7: Traditional Melodies of the British Isles, with Variations* (n.d.), p. 5.

Figure 7 Foot's Minuet (First Fleet Piano website)

In March 1791, she wrote to Bridget Kingdon mentioning that their new house was ornamented by Mr Worgan's pianoforte, which may have been there since January. Worgan told Elizabeth she could

have the piano before his return to England in April 1791. Within a short period, Elizabeth had shown aptitude and rapid development. In her letter to Bridget in March 1791, she states that she was able to play *God Save the King* and *Foot's Minuet*.

After receiving a land grant of fifty acres near Parramatta in 1793, (now Captain) John Macarthur used free convict labour to construct a small cottage on the cleared land that he named Elizabeth Farm in honour of his wife. Worgan's piano was probably moved to the cottage in November 1793 when the family moved there permanently, where it remained for at least the next seventeen years.

In January 1810, Elizabeth Macarthur seems to have replaced Worgan's piano with a larger and finer one purchased at auction from the estate of Thomas Laycock (c1756-1809). John Macarthur died in April 1834, and Elizabeth in February 1850. From all reports, she was beloved and revered by all who knew her⁷. Perhaps her most remarkable achievement was her management of the Macarthurs' complex agricultural and business empire⁸, both in her husband's long absences in England and after his death⁹.

The First Fleet piano today

There is considerable debate about the current identity of George Worgan's piano. Of those still in existence, one possibility is a 1780-1786 Frederick Beck piano that was donated to the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts by the Sydney collector Stewart Symonds. The other candidate is a Longman and Broderip pianoforte owned by Brian Barrow of Waverley which is stamped with the number 604, meaning that it was made about 1785-1786¹⁰.

In February 2010, the Beck piano was moved from its location in Ermington and placed in the dining room of Elizabeth Farm cottage. This was thought to be the drawing room prior to an 1826 renovation of the building¹¹. The Beck piano was returned to England in 2019 for refurbishment, and media coverage revealed the existence of the Longman and Broderip piano, which was also claimed to be Worgan's First Fleet piano. Both pianos were reportedly sold by the same dealer with similar provenances claiming prior ownership by Elizabeth Macarthur¹².

John Benham

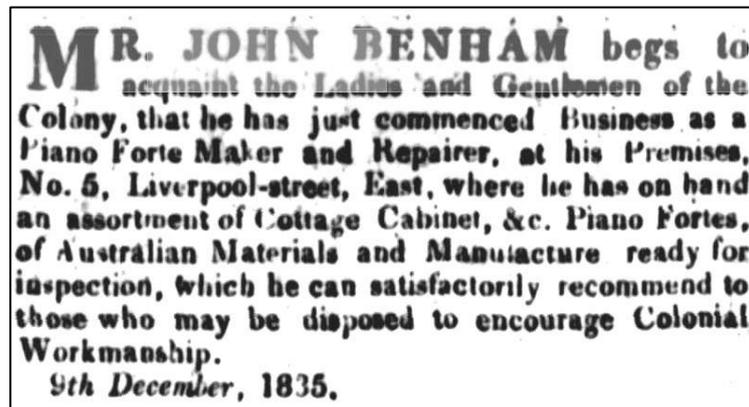


Figure 8 Robert Campbell and piano (Charles Rodius)

Australia's first music shop was a "spacious warehouse" built by Robert Campbell (1769-1846) at 93 George Street in 1824. He advertised "the most extensive and elegant assortment of musical

instruments and printed music ever imported into this colony". He also offered piano tuning¹³. A portrait of Campbell in 1834 shows him seated near a piano. It is either an upright grand piano or a cabinet piano. Campbell, who became a wealthy merchant, pastoralist and politician, could easily have afforded such an expensive and rare instrument¹⁴.

John Benham (c1784-1845) arrived in Australia by assisted passage from England in 1833, describing himself on the shipping list as a carpenter¹⁵, although he was called a cabinet maker in the *Sydney Herald's* report on the ship's arrival¹⁶. He arrived with his wife Jane and three sons who all became pianoforte makers: Charles Edward Benham (c1816-1849), Henry Benham (born c1817) and Daniel Benham (c1821-1897)¹⁷.



MR. JOHN BENHAM begs to
acquaint the Ladies and Gentlemen of the
Colony, that he has just commenced Business as a
Piano Forte Maker and Repairer, at his Premises,
No. 6, Liverpool-street, East, where he has on hand
an assortment of Cottage Cabinet, &c. Piano Fortes,
of Australian Materials and Manufacture ready for
inspection, which he can satisfactorily recommend to
those who may be disposed to encourage Colonial
Workmanship.
9th December, 1835.

Figure 9 John Benham advert (*Sydney Gazette*, 1 December 1835)

He was repairing pianos in Sydney by July 1835 when he gave evidence in a civil trial concerning goods that were claimed to be sold at below their real value. He said he was a pianoforte maker and that some two or three months earlier he had repaired the piano mentioned in the trial, thought it was a very good one and valued it at £68¹⁸.

He started advertising his piano-making business in Goulburn Street in 1835, making him the first colonial piano maker. He started by making cottage pianos from local wood¹⁹. The Sydney Powerhouse Museum has one of Benham's pianos in its collection, manufactured in about 1835. It is made from Australian timbers, including kauri or hoop pine for the soundboard and Australian red cedar for the casework. It has a six-octave range and is strung in pairs of strings throughout. The hammers were originally covered in leather²⁰.

Benham worked at various inner city addresses in Sydney until his death in 1845²¹. Soon afterwards, his widow and one of his sons advertised that they had moved the business from York Place to Bridge Street, where pianos could be tuned and repaired²².

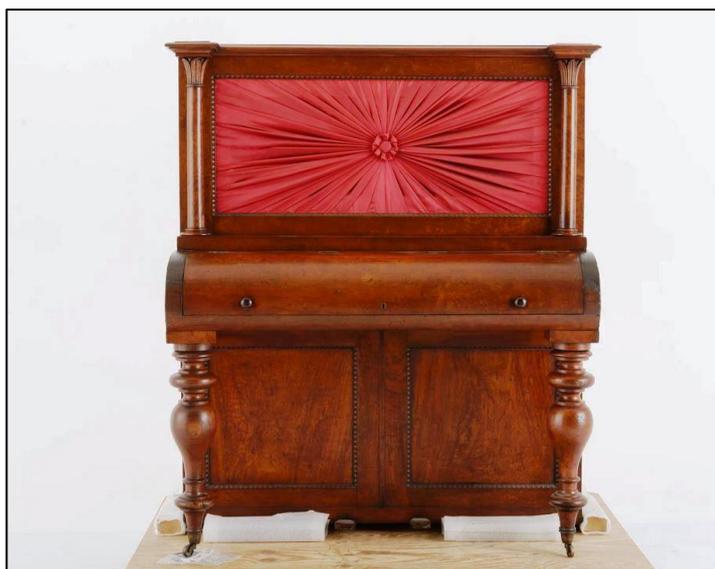


Figure 10 John Benham piano (Sydney Powerhouse Museum)

William King

William King (c1811-1881) migrated from London and in January 1849 began to advertise a new business as a pianoforte maker at 575 George Street. He stated that he had many years of experience at the prestigious London piano maker John Broadwood & Sons, and could make, repair and regulate pianos²³. A year later, he advertised that he had just landed a shipment of Broadwood cottage and square pianos, as well as material for repairing them²⁴.

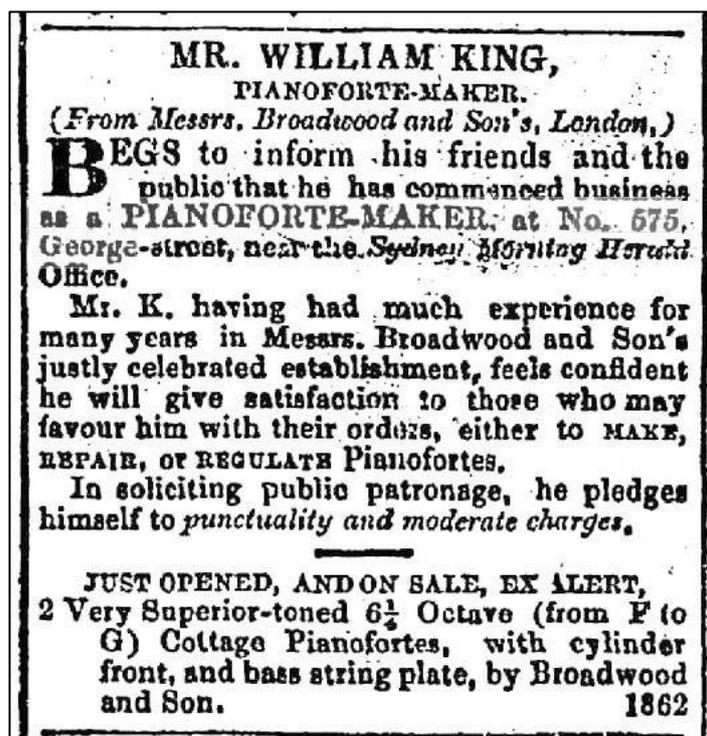


Figure 11 William King's first advert (Sydney Morning Herald 31 January 1849)

After initially advertising himself as a piano maker, he only advertised as a piano importer²⁵, repairer and tuner at his Pianoforte and Music Warehouse²⁶ after that, and seemed to specialise in

Broadwood pianos. He may have imported the pianos in pieces and assembled them in his warehouse. He died in March 1880 at age 70²⁷.

A middle class status symbol

During the nineteenth century, the piano signified upward social mobility in the Australian colonies and the mark of a cultured household, conferring respectability. It crossed social boundaries to become available not only in drawing rooms but also in goldfields singing tents, pubs and brothels. By the 1870s, after 150 years of development, the piano established itself in concert halls and in the home²⁸.

A clear indication of the popularity of piano playing is that about 700,000 pianos were imported into Australia during the nineteenth century²⁹, gracing almost every school, church hall, hospital and pub. The piano made a great variety of music accessible through arrangements for piano, including opera and orchestral music, for either two or four hands.

While a piano was a prominent feature of home life in the twentieth century until the end of World War II, it was mainly girls that learned to play it in early Australia, as part of an education in the social graces. Women were discouraged from playing most other instruments, but the piano was always socially acceptable. Daughters and mothers were expected to play the piano after dinner to accompany songs, which contributed to family life and recreation for the father after work. The piano played a prominent role in Australian literature, for example in the works of Rolf Boldrewood, Henry Handel Richardson and Henry Lawson, where it was a symbol of imported Britishness to the colonies, class differences and the social organisation of the family³⁰.

The English novelist Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) travelled to Australia in July 1871 to visit his younger son Frederick, who was a sheep farmer near Grenfell, New South Wales. He then spent a year travelling widely throughout the country, visiting mines, sheep stations, lunatic asylums, and the Port Arthur penal colony and cemetery. The result was the book *Australia and New Zealand*, published in 1873.

Trollope wrote that Australians would go beyond their means to have a piano in the house. He also thought that the number of sheep in a pastoral property would generally indicate with fair accuracy the prosperity and mode of life of the homestead:

- A hundred thousand sheep and upwards required a professional cook and a butler to look after them [the farmers' family, not the sheep].
- Forty thousand sheep could not be shorn without a piano [in the house].
- Twenty thousand was the lowest number that made an imperative of napkins at dinner.
- Ten thousand sheep required absolute plenty: meat in plenty, tea in plenty, brandy and colonial wine in plenty (but do not expect champagne or sherry)³¹.

Some Englishmen urged emigrants to take a piano with them to foreign places. The musicologist Roger Covell observed that the values of the middle class were "rarely expressed with more touching gallantry and tenacity than in the sacrifices and discomforts endured by countless families in order to bring this cumbersome symbol of higher values to their chosen home in small unstable ships and on grinding bullock drays"³².

For many settlers who found themselves in what must have seemed like a cultural wasteland, the piano became a tangible symbol of the re-establishment of a polite and ordered society. In 1843, a traveller through the wilds of western Victoria expressed astonishment at finding “a piano, a well-stocked table and a lighted fire” in the living room of a pioneer homestead. The piano ranked beside shelter and food in the list of colonial essentials³³.

The local piano manufacturing industry

Local manufacturing expands

Intercolonial Exhibitions were held in the Exhibition Building in Prince Alfred Park in 1870, 1873 and 1875, to display the expanding range of colonial produce, especially in agriculture and mining. In 1879, the great exhibitions moved to the newly-constructed Garden Palace in what is now the Royal Botanic Gardens, where the Sydney International Exhibition was the first colonial exhibition of its type held outside Europe or the United States of America.

The exhibitions of 1879 and into the 1880s provided a showcase for the beginnings of a manufacturing industry. Local piano makers began to produce instruments specifically for local conditions. Between 1870 and 1930, Australian piano manufacturers were subject to fierce competition between German and English manufacturers for the lucrative Australian market. German makers commanded a strong reputation after their powerful presence at the 1879, 1880 and 1888 Sydney and Melbourne trade exhibitions, where German pianos had won prizes³⁴.

At the 1879 exhibition, some sixty piano manufacturers came from Europe, the USA and Australia, including staff from the Steinway and Bechstein companies. Business boomed as a result, and the music merchant W. H. Paling observed that there was a steadily increasing taste for music, which formed a marked feature of Australian life³⁵.

William and Emil Ezold

William Ezold (c1836-1907) was born at Ronneburg in Saxe-Altenburg, Germany, where his brother Emil was also born in 1849. William migrated to Australia in 1876, landing first in Melbourne then travelling to Sydney³⁶. In August 1877, he advertised his services as a piano maker, tuner and repairer at 215 Goulburn Street, Surry Hills³⁷. In February 1878, he expanded his business and opened a pianoforte warehouse at 46 Oxford Street³⁸.

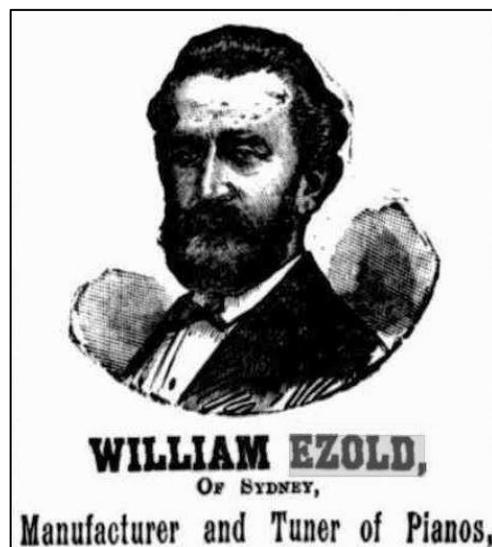


Figure 12 William Ezold (*Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 6 August 1889)

At the Sydney International Exhibition in October 1879, the concert pianist Jules Meilhan gave a recital in the New South Wales Court on a Bechstein grand concert piano. William Ezold was the sole agent for this prestigious German brand in Australia³⁹. A few days later, the same pianist played a

piano manufactured by William Ezold, which was acknowledged as evidence of the colony's progress in one of the fine arts⁴⁰. Visitors to the international exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne witnessed the birth of an industry that was destined to rise during the Federation period⁴¹.



Figure 13 William Ezold at the Garden Palace 1879 (State Library of NSW)

A report on the exhibition the following month mentioned that William Ezold was once employed in the factory of the great piano maker Ernst Kaps in Dresden. For his own piano, he used colonial pine and cedar, English beech, American rosewood and sandalwood. The iron frame was partly cast and partly forged, while the action was modelled on that of Bechstein. Some parts were imported because the machinery to make them was not available here. This excellent specimen of colonial workmanship marked a new stage in New South Wales industry, and the journalist thought that its courageous creator deserved to be honoured for showing what Sydney is capable of in this art⁴².

William Ezold's piano won the prize for a colonial manufactured piano at the exhibition, which he proclaimed in advertisements for his services after the exhibition closed⁴³. However, he suffered the loss of a consignment of eleven pianos when the barque *Romeo* was wrecked about 25 miles west of Gabo Island in February 1882. Other piano importers were also unlucky, because a total of 126 pianos were listed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as going down with the ship⁴⁴.

Ezold's business prospered during the 1880s, and in November 1886 he advertised that his piano warehouse had moved from its location in Sydney Arcade to a larger showroom over Cole's Book Arcade at 384 George Street⁴⁵. In 1890, he took over the management of the German Club and boarding house at Cleveland House in Buckingham Street, Surry Hills⁴⁶. He used the outbuildings to import and make pianos before moving the business to Denison Street Waverley in 1891⁴⁷.

In 1898, William Ezold retired from the piano business and moved to the northern New South Wales town of Macksville, where he ran the general store⁴⁸. He became something of a pillar of the local community, being appointed a Justice of the Peace and serving on the Macksville Bench of Magistrates⁴⁹. He was also elected a trustee for the property belonging to the local congregation of the Presbyterian Church⁵⁰.

In September 1903, the local Bench issued an arrest warrant for the Reverend Donald H. McEachern, who was charged with obtaining £40 by false pretences from William Ezold. The duplicitous divine must have done a runner, as his description was circulated in the Police Gazette: medium build with a florid complexion, auburn hair, moustache and whiskers. He was recently a minister of the local Presbyterian Church⁵¹. He was arrested four months later and remanded for trial at Kempsey Quarter Sessions Court⁵².

William Ezold JP died in Macksville in November 1907⁵³. In his time, he made a significant contribution to the Australian piano manufacturing industry, mainly due to the opportunity of exhibiting his pianos to the world at the colonial and international exhibitions of his time.

William's younger brother Emil (1849-1916) (who was sometimes recorded as Carl Emile Ezold) arrived in Sydney in 1878 from Hamburg via New York⁵⁴ and started working with William in his piano warehouse at 46 Oxford Street. Emil started his own business in March 1882, advertising that he was repairing, tuning and everything else connected with the piano trade at 69 Goulburn Street⁵⁵. In August 1883, he had moved his piano warehouse to 587 George Street in Brickfield Hill⁵⁶.



Figure 14 Emil Ezold (ancestry.com.au)

Two years later, he moved to Clairsford House in Nelson Street, Balmain⁵⁷, and two months after that he moved again to Penelope Cottage in Darling Street, Balmain West⁵⁸. His final move in 1888 was to Lyonsville House in Lyons Road, Drummoyne⁵⁹. He died at Drummoyne in Jun 1916⁶⁰.

Octavius Beale

Octavius Charles Beale (1850-1930) was the eighth of twelve children born to Quakers Joseph and Margaret Beale in Queen's County, Ireland. The family left Ireland when it was still in the grip of the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s and migrated to Australia in search of gold. Joseph and his older sons first came to Melbourne, and Octavius and his mother followed in December 1854 to join his father and siblings, who by then were in Tasmania.



Figure 15 Octavius Beale (National Library of Australia)

Octavius returned to Ireland in 1860 to complete his education at a Quaker school in Waterford. He returned to Australia in 1866 and commenced work in a Melbourne hardware firm as a cashier then as a travelling salesman. He joined the piano maker Hugo Wertheim to import and make sewing machines, and then started importing pianos from Germany⁶¹. After a brief association with Wertheim, he moved to Sydney in about 1884 and established Beale & Co, piano and sewing machine importers. He was the managing director until 1930.

Despite the economic depression of the 1890s, Beale & Co shifted their focus from importing pianos to making their own, and in 1893 Octavius Beale established a large piano factory at Annandale⁶², where production proper commenced in 1900. In November 1901, Beale took out a patent in Germany for his piano's most distinguishing feature, the use of a nut to fasten the shaft of the tuning pin. This was intended to ensure the stability of the tuning under the tremendous demands made by extremes of climate in Australia⁶³. The company made all of its own components, while continuing to make sewing machines.

Beale's company report in 1929 claimed that in the preceding few years, more pianos had arrived in Australia than the rest of the world combined, and in fact more than half of all American piano exports were shipped to Australia at this time⁶⁴. Like most businesses, Beale went through troubled times in the 1930s Depression, recovering in 1948 only to be hit by the start of television in 1956. In addition, from the 1930s the gramophone and the talking movie combined to challenge the ubiquity of the piano and the player piano.

The Beale factory went into voluntary liquidation in 1939, although it received a boost producing parts for Mosquito bombers for De Havilland during World War II. By 1951, Beale had produced some 75,000 pianos. Its operations were reduced to 4.5 acres in Annandale, employing 250 workers, but it was still claiming to be the largest self-contained piano factory in the British Commonwealth⁶⁵. After the war it became harder to compete with cheap imported pianos, especially Yamaha models from Japan. W. H. Paling bought out Beale and Co in the 1960s.

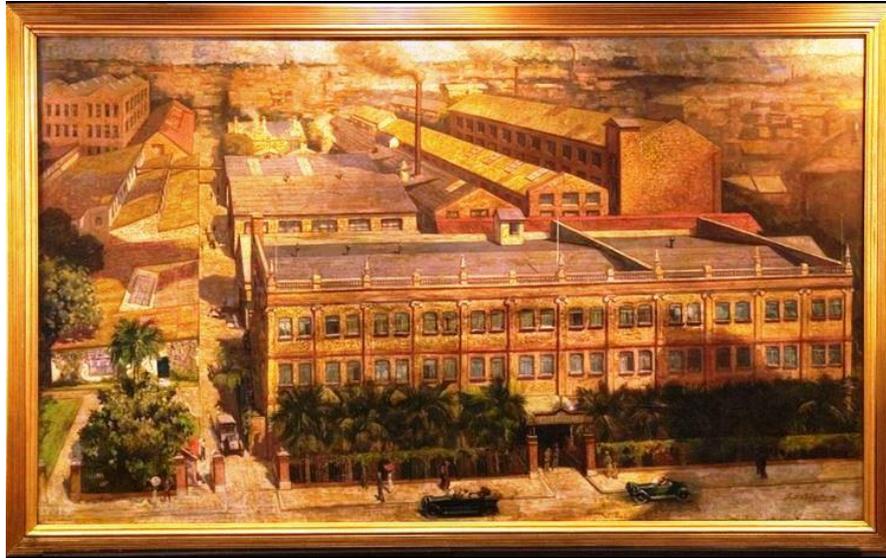


Figure 16 Beale factory Annandale, 1920s (Smith & Julius Studio)

The factory was forced to cease production in 1975 because it could not compete with low-cost Japanese and Chinese imports⁶⁶. In its heyday, Beale & Co was the standout brand in Australia, making 95,000 pianos between 1896 and the 1960s. Octavius Beale succeeded by building a modern factory to make pianos for local conditions and valuing his workforce, after being spectacularly successful with the sewing machine. He knew that European pianos were of mixed quality and that replacement parts were difficult to obtain, and he soon found that demand exceeded supply for both sewing machines and pianos⁶⁷.

Octavius Beale was a man of affairs with a wide range of interests, participating in various Chambers of Manufacturing and Commerce, maintaining an involvement in history, the arts and music, and joining the Freemasons after converting to Protestantism. He died in a motor car accident at Stroud in 1930⁶⁸.

The impact of World War I

Silencing German pianos

Anti-German feeling was strong at the start of World War I in August 1914. Most German nationals were interned, and Australians of German origin suffered social and economic discrimination. Accordingly, many German pianos were returned to suppliers in favour of British models, or were abandoned or even burned. Attitudes to all German imports changed during and after World War I. Trade ceased abruptly in 1916 when all German imports were prohibited by the Australian Government. German pianos were officially silenced, and there was an increase in support for British pianos.

After the war, lingering bitterness towards Germans after the loss of so many family members meant that Australian councils and clubs suffered heated exchanges over the continued use of German pianos on their premises. If nothing else, it illustrated the continued emotional importance of the piano in people's lives.

American manufacturing continued throughout the war (America was not actively involved in the war until the country slowly mobilised by mid-1918) and goods were exported to many countries, including Australia. Civilians donated pianos to hospitals in Australia and England during the war. After the war, American pianos took over the German pianos as the main imports.

Wartime morale boosters

The Cheer-Up Society of South Australia was formed in 1914 and attracted hundreds of women volunteers who visited army camps and hospitals, befriending lonely recruits, sending comforts to the front and welcoming the returning wounded. Cheer-Up Huts were in many places around the State, where a piano was a central feature of the activities alongside the gramophone. The Cheer-Up Society wound down after World War I but was revived during World War II. While it was a successful form of social healing in South Australia, there were no newspaper reports of its operation outside that State⁶⁹.

A Robinson Piano Company upright piano, manufactured in Thailand in the 1930s, was installed in the Changi prison camp in Singapore where some 15,000 Australian servicemen were incarcerated soon after the fall of Singapore in February 1942. The piano was reportedly "liberated" from the sailors' mess in the former British submarine base located nearby. One of the members of the recently-formed Australian Concert Party decided that the group needed a piano, so he went through the perimeter wire one night and hauled it back to the camp.



Figure 17 The Changi piano (Australian War Memorial)

The concert party's increasingly professional shows became so popular, including with the Japanese soldiers, that tickets had to be rationed. At the end of the war in 1945, permission to bring their

beloved piano to Australia was initially refused until the members of the Concert Party insisted they would not board the troop transport without it. The authorities finally relented and it was loaded and lashed to the deck. The piano was firstly taken home by the comedian “Happy Harry” Smith from the Concert Party, and then moved to different locations before being abandoned in Tasmania after a variety tour in 1992. Harry Smith’s son and grandson eventually tracked it down and arranged for it to be flown to the Australian War Memorial in 2011⁷⁰. The risks taken to acquire the piano in 1942 and the efforts made to retrieve and preserve it are testament to the strong sentimental bond between people, place and time that a piano can represent.

New South Wales Conservatorium of Music

During World War I and in the following decade, the Labor government of New South Wales under Premier William Holman emphasised the importance of music as an agent of social cohesion. He worked towards the establishment of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, which was opened by Governor Sir Gerald Strickland in May 1915. In 1936, Nicholson and Company provided the Conservatorium with a “full house” when 48 new pianos were delivered in a convoy of trucks queued up to deliver the new and take away the old instruments.

The Conservatorium was the first State-funded music institution in the British Empire, and was unique in the English-speaking world. Although such State funding had been a feature of European States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British did not establish full State funding for special music schools until 1945, as part of Britain’s program of post-war reconstruction. Australian government involvement in genteel music culture was a kind of unique Australian phenomenon⁷¹.

The challenge of the player piano

Automatically-playing stringed instruments date back at least to the sixteenth century. The inventory of King Henry VIII’s instruments in 1547 included “an instrument that goethe with a whele without playing upon”⁷². The modern player piano uses a pneumatic or electromagnetic mechanism to operate a keyboard via pre-programmed music recorded on perforated rolls. It was the result of several decades of experimentation in Europe and America from the 1840s onwards.

Foot-operated bellows provided a vacuum to operate a pneumatic motor and drive the movement of the player roll, while each small inrush of air through the holes was amplified sufficiently to strike a note. The Aeolian Company of New York manufactured the first practical pneumatic piano player in 1896, called the Pianola. By 1903 the company offered 9,000 music rolls of classical, light and religious music. Its heyday was between 1900 and 1930⁷³.

Meanwhile, the German inventor Edwin Welte launched a device in 1904 that was known as the Reproducing Piano. It could reproduce all aspects of a performance automatically, so the piano would play back a recorded performance exactly as if the original pianist were sitting at the keyboard. Manufacturers could then get famous pianists and composers of the day, such as Rachmaninov, Liszt and Gershwin, to record their performances on a piano roll. In this way, player piano owners could experience a professional concert in their own living room.



Figure 18 Pianola, 1897 (National Museum of American History)

One innovation was the “word roll”, which featured printed lyrics in the margins, making it easy to use player pianos to accompany singing in the home, a popular activity before radio and the gramophone became widely available. By the 1920s, the new jazz age and the rise of the foxtrot confirmed the player piano as the favoured instrument of popular music, with classical music increasingly relegated to the Reproducing Piano. The player piano promoted listening to music together at home, but it also promoted a passive approach to music, much like the gramophone and radio, so it undermined the motivation to learn to play the instrument.

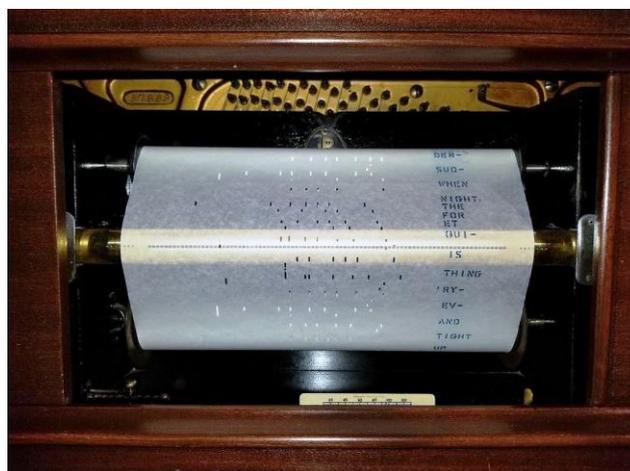


Figure 19 Player piano roll (Wikimedia)

Beale & Co manufactured player pianos in its Annandale factory until the 1950s, as did Hugo Wertheim in Melbourne⁷⁴. The advent of radio broadcasting in the 1920s began to kill off the

popularity of the player piano. A wireless receiver was much cheaper to buy than a player piano and it offered a greater variety of entertainment and education without the need to purchase player rolls. In the end, people stopped buying player pianos⁷⁵.

The Fotoplayer in silent movies

Silent movies were never heard in silence, which was partly intended to hide the noise from the projector and partly to enhance the on-screen action with music and other sounds that matched the mood of the film, whether romantic, fast-paced or mysterious. At the simplest level, small cinemas employed a pianist to play accompanying music, often with suggestions from the film-maker. But larger cinemas used ensembles of instruments from a few players or more.



Figure 20 Fotoplayer piano (Silent Cinema Society)

An adaptation of the player piano was the Fotoplayer (“foto” from photoplay and “player” from player piano), a wonderful contraption that was devised to provide a wide range of music and sound effects for silent movies. They appeared around 1912 and were used in medium-sized theatres. They were cheap to operate, as the player did not have to be a musician because they used piano rolls (although they had to be skilled in playing the right sound effect at the right moment).

The device used a combination of piano, organ pipes, drums and various sound effects designed to accompany the action of silent films. Pedals, levers, switches, buttons and pull cords were all used to turn on a xylophone, beat a drum, ring a bell, blow a train whistle, create the sound of thunder or chirp like a bird. Thousands of American Fotoplayers were in use during their heyday, but they quickly became obsolete when talkies were introduced in the late 1920s⁷⁶.

The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney has a working Fotoplayer made by the American Photo Player Company of California in about 1918. It was originally purchased in 1929 for the newly-built Goolwa Centenary Hall. However, this was almost the end of the silent movie era, so it was never used at the time. It was put in storage for three decades, and is therefore in a very good state of preservation. In 1984 it was restored and donated to the museum by the Mastertouch Piano Roll Company. Since 1988 has been used in the King’s Cinema inside the museum to accompany exhibitions of silent films⁷⁷.

Revival and decline of piano making

Economic Depression and World War II

By 1930, the golden era of Australian piano manufacturing was over, and worldwide trade was hit hard by the Great Depression of the early 1930s. During the period 1927-1932, American production dropped from 250,000 to 25,000 pianos a year, Germany fell from 100,000 to 6,000 and England from 92,000 to 30,000⁷⁸. The piano industry in Australia was also badly affected: in 1926-27, 24,000 pianos were sold, but in 1931-32 only 170 were sold, and 26 of these were imported⁷⁹.

But the interest in music did not decline during the Depression, and to recover from this crisis, piano makers made efforts to win a share of the market again. The result was that small pianos, such as short grand pianos and upright pianos up to 100cm in height gained popularity through the 1930s. Cheaper materials such as plastic and laminated timber began to be used⁸⁰. By 1935, every piano factory in London was again working overtime. Somewhat surprisingly, radio had stimulated an interest in active music making⁸¹. The piano revival of the 1930s lasted until World War II was declared in 1939, when piano production in Australia suddenly ceased by Federal Government order⁸².

Post-war era

Piano manufacturing resumed in Australia after the end of World War II. But the first major economic challenge faced by all piano sellers from 1956 onwards was the commencement of television broadcasting. On the other hand, an unexpected boost came from the popularity of The Liberace Show, featuring the eponymous pianist⁸³.



Figure 21 Liberace, c1968 (*New York Times*, 27 May 2013)

Wladziu Valentino Liberace (1919-1987) was an American pianist, singer and actor. He was born in Wisconsin to parents of Italian and Polish descent and enjoyed a career spanning four decades of concerts, recordings and television. At the height of his fame from the 1950s to the 1970s, he was the world's highest paid entertainer⁸⁴. He embraced a lifestyle of flamboyant excess both on and off the stage. Liberace's hugely popular and over-the-top performances on television helped to

popularise the piano by bringing it into living rooms everywhere. He made the piano a mainstream phenomenon in a way that no-one else has managed to do since⁸⁵.

But before long, stiff competition for local piano manufacturers came from Japanese Yamaha pianos, which had been established back in 1887, and by the 1950s was a mega-company. Yamaha responded to the trend towards smaller homes with less space for pianos by producing smaller and less ornate pianos, called “spinet” pianos. Yamaha pianos were lower, which was a benefit in the classroom, because teachers could see over them to the students, although they had a less impressive tone due to a shorter string length⁸⁶.

Charles Edwin Davies

Charles Edwin Davies (1899-1978) was born in Paddington and left school in 1914 to become an apprentice with Beale and Company. He gained valuable experience in the many departments of the factory, and learned to play the piano and violin. In 1921, Davies began a business as a piano maker and trader in Randwick, buying, reconditioning and selling pianos. His business prospered and he eventually employed forty staff⁸⁷.

In the 1930s, Geoff Allan of the Melbourne music publishing house approached Charles Davies to make pianos for Allans to sell, but World War II interfered with their work⁸⁸. After spending World War II mainly in a munitions factory making aircraft parts, in 1946 Davies set up a piano manufacturing business in Surry Hills⁸⁹, where he secured Government contracts to supply schools and hospitals with upright pianos⁹⁰. During the war, Davies produced a limited number of pianos in his Randwick factory, giving them the brand Seivad, the reverse of his surname⁹¹.



Figure 22 Davies Piano factory, Surry Hills, 1965 (City of Sydney Archives)

The company’s flagship model was the Symphony piano, designed by Charles Davies. A newspaper advertisement in April 1947 described the piano as featuring an imported all-British action, 88-note keyboard, Canadian spruce soundboard, and a full iron frame⁹². In 1952, another advert described

casework of rich Italian and French walnut in blonde mahogany and rosewood shades. The company even made the claim that “we can match your furnishings”⁹³.

The company had its own iron foundry on railway land at Yagoona where it produced piano frames for its own models and for Beale. All parts of the Symphony were hand-made, mostly from imported materials. His sons, Robert, Leslie and Peter joined the business as soon as they were old enough. He also secured a contract to make German Thurmer pianos for Allans Music. Because the player piano had come and gone by then, Davies was not confronted by the added complexity of installing player actions. Beale had been forced to diversify into radio by then, but Davies operated on a smaller scale and focused on producing the Symphony⁹⁴.



Figure 23 Seivad piano (Specialty Pianos website)

The business prospered in the immediate post-war period, and in 1950 Davies added a third storey to the factory to cater for the extra production⁹⁵. However, production slowed in the late 1950s with the introduction of television. Then in the 1960s, stiff competition from Yamaha pianos prompted Allans Music Ltd to urge Davies to make the smaller “spinet” style pianos or risk losing their support. Davies quickly adapted to the new style, dismantling a Yamaha spinet piano, making design improvements and then manufacturing his own. Local pianos were cheaper than imports, which were also subject to an import tariff.

During the Vietnam War, Davies supplied five pianos to the Defence Department for troop entertainment. These lived in crates on the back of trucks which were driven around to concert venues. But local production costs and higher wages eventually sank Davies’ company, a familiar story in Australian manufacture more broadly. His last instrument was assembled in 1978 and the company ceased operation in 1979.

At the time, the company was Australia’s last piano manufacturer. C. E. Davies and Sons produced about 14,000 pianos in 33 years of manufacturing. Some of the staff had stayed with the company their whole working lives. Charles Davies’ sons continued to tune and service many of the pianos made by the family business, while also making a living as professional musicians⁹⁶.

Ron Overs

In 1976 at the age of 23, Ron Overs established his own business in a small space in Concord, Sydney. He specialised in rebuilding pianos, especially grand pianos. The cultural cringe meant that inferior imported pianos were often favoured over locally-made ones. He has a modest un-signposted shopfront in Concord Road. Inside is a labyrinth of pianos in various states of assembly. He installs parts he designed himself (and sometimes patented) while rebuilding pianos.



Figure 24 Ron Overs (overspianos.com.au)

One of the high quality grand pianos Overs rebuilt would now cost around \$250,000, but he and his team rebuilt it for the National Library of Australia for \$60,000. The innovations of new technologies and craft have made Ron Overs' work internationally recognised⁹⁷.

Wayne Stuart

Despite the market domination by Asian piano manufacturers, one Australian is bold enough to make bespoke pianos: Wayne Stuart, who was born in Ulverstone, Tasmania in 1954. During his teens, he worked in the country halls of Tasmania as an old time dance player. In 1974, he undertook the first institutionalised course for piano technicians in Australia at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, under the auspices of the Yamaha Company.



Figure 25 Wayne Stuart's 108-note piano (Stuart and Sons website)

He developed a passion to build a worthy piano for the twenty-first century⁹⁸. In 1984, he established the Australian Centre for Musical Instrument Technology at the Preston College of TAFE in Melbourne, relocating to the University of Newcastle in the 1990s. There he laid plans to re-establish Australian piano making through teaching⁹⁹.

In 2001, the company Piano Australia was formed in partnership with J. Albert & Son. The aim was to finance the foundation of an Australian piano maker, a long time passion of Robert Albert AO. The enterprise developed as a specialist maker of high quality acoustic grand pianos. In 2013, the business became completely family owned, and in 2015 relocated to Tumut in the New South Wales Snowy Mountains. A commission in 2016 allowed a pioneering 108 key piano with four pedals to be constructed and delivered to Beleura House in the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria¹⁰⁰.

Music publishing

Local music publishing is established

Popular sheet music by London publishers was imported into Australia in large numbers in the 1830s and 1840s¹⁰¹. The Novello Publishing Company, established in England in 1832, fostered the growth of cheap printed music and this quickly transferred to Australia¹⁰². By the 1840s, Sydney music printers were issuing pirated local editions of imported titles. The earliest editions of genuine Australian musical compositions were also printed in Britain¹⁰³.



Figure 26 Joseph Alfred Novello (*Musical Times*, Vol 44, 1903)

The first sheet music published in Australia was *A Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe* by Dr. J Lhotsky, 1834. The wealth generated in the 1850s gold rushes resulted in the middle classes spending more time and money on entertainments. There were increasing sales of pianos and other instruments, many more musicians undertook music teaching, both men and women.

There was an outpouring of music publishing that was amazing in its musical diversity and technical expertise, especially in Sydney. Some of the latest popular songs and dances were imported from England, and others were local compositions. There was a greater understanding that Australian compositions had to be connected to local people, topics or events if they were likely to sell well¹⁰⁴.

Francis Ellard

Francis Ellard (c1802-1854) was born in Ireland and worked in his father Andrew's piano factory in Dublin¹⁰⁵. In December 1832, he arrived in Sydney with his wife and two young children¹⁰⁶. He set up a music business in Hunter Street in February 1833¹⁰⁷. He and his family were significant in publishing, engraving and composing and performing music for the next 25 years or more. He began importing music and making, repairing, tuning and selling musical instruments. His shop soon became a major focal point for music in Sydney, and musicians and teachers operated from within his premises.

He began publishing music in 1835¹⁰⁸. His father Andrew came out to join Francis in 1839 and set up his own business in Pitt Street. But the two fell out, and Andrew only stayed a year before returning to Ireland and then to England¹⁰⁹.

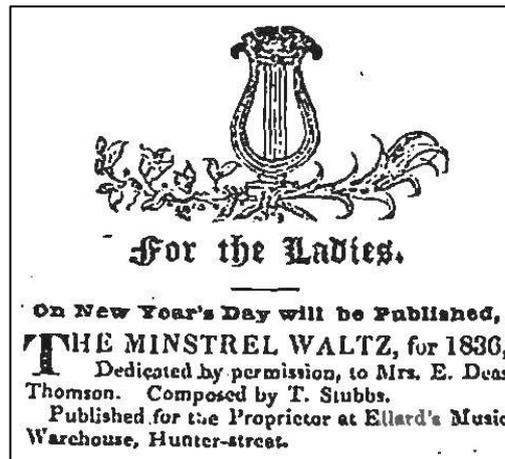


Figure 27 Francis Ellard publishing (*Sydney Herald*, 31 December 1835)

Francis was declared insolvent in 1842¹¹⁰, and this probably slowed down his publishing for a while, but he continued publishing a steady stream of items through the 1840s. But he used relatively few local composers. Many works first published by Ellard were transferred to other publishers. J. T. Grocott took over Ellard's premises in 1847¹¹¹, and many of Grocott's titles were later taken over by Henry Marsh. Ellard then engraved music through the 1850s for other publishers and printers, including Woolcott and Clarke, J. R. Clarke, Henry Marsh and Co, W. H. Johnson and Kemp & Fairfax¹¹². Francis Ellard died in Sydney in July 1854 at age 52¹¹³.

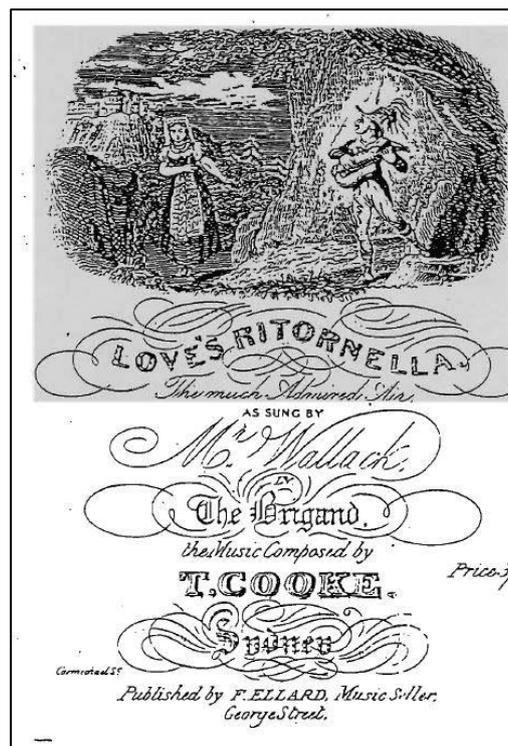


Figure 28 Francis Ellard engraving (Neidorf, University of Wollongong)

The 1860s was quieter in the music publishing front. The most popular music styles, opera and minstrel shows, mostly used imported music¹¹⁴. Ellard was the pioneer music seller in Sydney in the 1830s, and his arrival coincided with John Benham's establishment of the first piano factory in Sydney. A steadily growing number of piano imports in the developing colony led to an increasing demand for sheet music.

Jacob Richard Clarke

Jacob Richard Clarke (1822-1893) was born in Taunton, Somerset. He left England as a young man with his wife and after some time in New Zealand settled in Sydney in about 1850¹¹⁵. In May 1850, he began to advertise a new fine art shop at 333 George Street, opposite St Andrew's Church, from which he was selling "rare engravings, water colour drawings and architectural and general literature"¹¹⁶.

From January 1851, he was acting an agent to Stephen Hale Marsh's music warehouse at 555 George Street¹¹⁷. Clarke published a collection of sketches of New South Wales by Conrad Martens the same year¹¹⁸. In April 1851, Clarke and William Prout Woolcott combined to establish "a registry of houses and estates intended to be let or sold", in an office at 555 George Street¹¹⁹. By 1854, the pair had published a substantial quantity of music. Clarke and Woolcott assembled several works into beautifully illustrated albums, demonstrating a synthesis of musical content, engraving and illustration that was rarely exceeded in the nineteenth century in Australia¹²⁰.

Clarke and Woolcott specialised in publishing light music and compositions by colonial and visiting artists¹²¹. In September 1856, the partnership was dissolved¹²². Woolcott had been a successful estate and land agent since the 1840s, and he continued this business after splitting with Clarke¹²³. Clarke continued alone, his Music Hall at 205 George Street becoming a popular meeting point for musicians.

After adding engraving and photographs to his business, he became a recognised authority on fine art. His *Australian Music Albums*, published in 1857 and 1862, are filled with examples of skilled technical production, and consist of samples of works by Australian composers. He was one of the first Australian publishers to produce music with coloured illustrations as frontispieces.

In October 1876, the Melbourne music publishers Nicholson and Ascherberg took over Clarke's music warehouse at 317 George Street¹²⁴. Hoping for an increased demand during the International Exhibition of 1879, he overstocked his shop and was forced into bankruptcy in May 1880. He was never able to recover financially from this setback. A second insolvency in 1885 ruined him completely. He died in poverty in July 1893 and his widow had to sell some of his papers to pay for the funeral.

317, GEORGE STREET
317, George-street
317, George-street

(late J. B. Clarke's)
NICHOLSON and ASCHERBERG,
 introducing themselves
 to the
Musical Public of Sydney
 and all
 New South Wales,
 beg to announce that they have taken those well-
 known premises, as above, and are now engaged
 making considerable alterations, which, when com-
 pleted, will make their
NEW ESTABLISHMENT
 the most attractive of any in the city.

Large **SHIPMENTS** are arriving
 of
PIANOPORTES,
CABINET ORGANS, and
HARMONIUMS,
 by all the most celebrated makers.

MUSIC
 Music
 Music
 will be shown, the grandest stock in Sydney.

NICHOLSON and ASCHERBERG,
 Pianoforte and Music Warehousemen,
 317, George-street, Sydney.
 and
 45 and 47, Collins-street, Melbourne.

Figure 29 J R Clarke takeover, 1876 (*Evening News*, 28 October 1876)

Despite the failure of his business, Clarke was for a long time a dominant figure in the emergence of Australian music. His publications provided access to the repertoire of visiting musicians, while encouraging the efforts of local composers. He enjoyed extensive connections among influential citizens, and was quick to capitalise on the enthusiasm aroused by contemporary concert performers¹²⁵.

Henry Marsh

Henry Charles Nibbs Marsh (1823-1906) and his older brother Stephen Hale Alonzo Marsh (1805-1888) arrived in Sydney in 1842 and about 1850 respectively, and were very active in the musical life of Sydney from the 1850s. Stephen was a concert pianist and later a harpist who began performing with his sister soon after their arrival¹²⁶. Henry was a pianist and composer, and after he arrived with his family, he and Stephen performed together¹²⁷.

The brothers also worked together as S. & M. Marsh & Co, importing and selling pianos from their shop at 6 Jamison Street¹²⁸. They also imported vocal and instrumental music from London from July 1850¹²⁹. But the brothers ended their working partnership in September 1850¹³⁰. Henry moved to new premises at 47 Hunter Street in November 1850 and continued to import and sell pianofortes and sheet music¹³¹.

Henry was also active as a teacher of the piano and music theory¹³², while the singer Sara Flower taught singing in Henry's shop¹³³. He began to publish music in May 1851, when he advertised *The Birthday Polka*, a dance composed for a grand ball that month at Government House in honour of Queen Victoria's birthday¹³⁴. He moved to a new store at 409½ George Street¹³⁵, which he advertised as his Sydney Pianoforte and Music Warerooms. He followed the current trend of publishing sheet

music that had been performed by visiting singers and musicians, for example the *Ethiopian Melodies*, as sung recently by the New York Serenaders¹³⁶.

By December 1851, Henry Marsh was organising grand concerts that enjoyed Vice-Regal patronage, for example a concert attended by the Governor-General Sir Charles FitzRoy at the Royal Victoria Theatre, during which Henry played a Czerny fantasia. The novelty item of the evening was a grand galope for twelve pianofortes. The newspaper report remarked on the difficulty of keeping so many instruments correctly tuned in Sydney's climate¹³⁷. In October 1852, Henry published the *Chusan Waltz*, which he composed for the ball dedicated to the officers of the P&O steamer *Chusan*¹³⁸.



Figure 30 Henry Marsh published music (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 August 1852)

By 1852, the painter George French Angas was illustrating Henry's compositions for publication¹³⁹. Henry combined with the newspaper publisher Walter George Mason to publish the *Illustrated Sydney News* in the early 1850s, but this partnership ended in July 1854¹⁴⁰. Henry Marsh was declared insolvent in February 1856¹⁴¹, and in October a large collection of pianos and other instruments were sold to recoup some of the losses from his estate¹⁴².

In May 1863, the Melbourne publishing firm Wilkie, Elvy and Co (which eventually became Allans Music) took over the publication and sale of Henry Marsh's popular dance music. The first piece published was *Australia's Wedding March*, composed for the wedding of Prince Albert Edward the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra in 1863¹⁴³. Australia's first Royal visit a few years later by Prince Alfred the Duke of Edinburgh, did not escape Henry's compositional attention, and his *Prince Alfred March* was published in December 1867 by Elvy & Co and Paling's¹⁴⁴.

Jacob R. Clarke took over the publication of Henry Marsh's compositions in 1871¹⁴⁵. Henry must have also given up his own business, because in July 1872 he was giving piano lessons at Paling's Music Depot in George Street¹⁴⁶. Then in July 1874, he left Sydney and moved to San Francisco¹⁴⁷ where his brother Stephen also moved at about the same time. Stephen made his first concert appearance as a harpist in October 1874 at Platt's Hall in San Francisco¹⁴⁸. The two brothers performed together in the following months, with Henry on the piano and Stephen on the harp¹⁴⁹.

Stephen died in San Francisco in August 1888¹⁵⁰, and Henry died there in May 1906¹⁵¹. A month before he passed away, Henry experienced the catastrophic earthquake that struck San Francisco early one morning in April 1906. The quake destroyed some 80% of the city and killed more than 3,000 people. At the time, Henry was living in the suburb of Alameda, across the bay from the centre of the city. This part of town was not as badly damaged as the city, although he would have witnessed the huge fire that broke out when gas pipes and bottles were ignited by the massive earth movement¹⁵².

While Henry Marsh's name is no longer remembered as well as other Australian music publishers such as Allans, Palings and Alberts, he was possibly unique in being a true musical all-rounder: an accomplished pianist and accompanist, composer, music publisher, piano teacher, and organiser of grand concerts. He, along with his brother Stephen, did much to foster the musical life of the colony at a time of growth and prosperity during the gold rush era of the 1850s.

W. H. Paling & Co

William Henry Paling (1825-1895), musician, merchant and philanthropist, was born in Holland, the son of a piano manufacturer. As a child, he showed considerable promise as a violinist. Later he taught at the Rotterdam Academy of Music. He arrived in Sydney in 1853 and quickly attracted attention as a music teacher and entrepreneur¹⁵³. In September 1855, he organised a grand concert in the Concert Hall of the Royal Hotel, during which he playing various pieces on the violin¹⁵⁴.

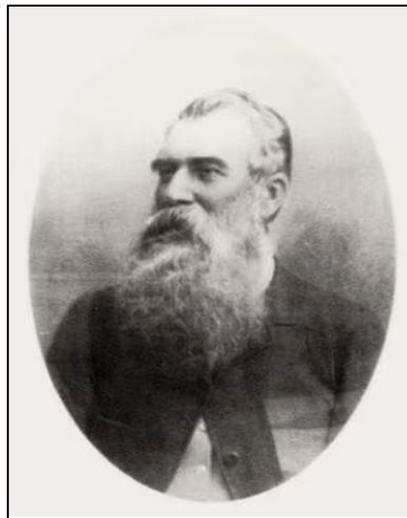


Figure 31 William Paling, 1880s (Sydney University)

In October 1855, Woolcott and Clarke published the *Sydney Railway Waltz* by William Paling, dedicated to the British civil engineer William Randle, who oversaw the construction of Sydney's first public railway. It was played for the first time at the Railway Ball. Paling also advertised two pianos for sale, which he had brought with him from Europe¹⁵⁵. The following month, Paling and Henry Marsh opened the New South Wales Academy of Music for the instruction of piano and singing¹⁵⁶. From his Academy he developed a thriving trade in imported pianos, including his father's. He also began publishing music. This significantly broadened the musical horizons of the Australian public¹⁵⁷.

As an accomplished musician, Paling found many opportunities in Sydney, frequently appearing in concerts as a pianist or a violinist. In April 1856, he displayed his versatility by taking the baton and

conducting an orchestral concert¹⁵⁸. In July 1856, he advertised the sale of a new shipment of imported pianos from his residence at 5 Bligh Street¹⁵⁹. From January 1857, he was advertising his store at 26 Hunter Street as a piano warehouse, where he was the agent for English Erard pianos¹⁶⁰.

Aside from giving private lessons, he worked as a professor of music at Springfield College in Darlinghurst. Paling's business became a Mecca for Sydney's music lovers. By 1875, the Wynyard Square premises had outgrown its usefulness as it was to do several times, and he moved numerous times to bigger warehouses, eventually to a large block of land at 356 George Street he purchased in 1883¹⁶¹.



Figure 32 Paling's Warehouse Sydney, 1883 (State Library of NSW)

At the Sydney Intercolonial Exhibition in 1875, William Paling exhibited six pianos, which included two grand concert pianos, an oblique piano (a piano with diagonally-arranged strings) in walnut and a cottage piano in rosewood. By then his music warehouse was at 335 George Street¹⁶², where he had an extensive showroom and box office, and began publishing music in a modest way. This built up during the 1880s and became voluminous in the 1890s. In 1883 he formed the limited company W. H. Paling & Company Ltd¹⁶³.

W. H. Paling & Co was notable for publishing a wide variety of popular music albums. The first one advertised in the press was the *Palings Christmas Album* in November 1885¹⁶⁴, although *The Daily Telegraph* reported at the time that the firm had already produced many similar albums¹⁶⁵. The *Christmas Albums* were eventually given edition numbers, and in December 1901 number 24 was published, dating the first one to about 1877¹⁶⁶, although later numbered *Christmas Albums*, including number 41 in December 1912¹⁶⁷ and number 48 in January 1920¹⁶⁸ both place the first one at about 1871.

The *Palings Christmas Albums* were advertised until December 1939, although from about 1920 they were simply called *Palings Albums*¹⁶⁹. It seemed that World War II restrictions put a stop to them, and they were not restarted after the war. The National Library of Australia records that in time

Paling's brought out albums with titles like *Paling's March Album*, *Paling's Piano Album*, *Paling's Dance Album*, *Palings Royal Dance Album* and *Paling's Piano Annual*¹⁷⁰.

Some of the factors contributing to Paling's success were his thorough knowledge of piano technology and piano repertoire, both of which were kept up to date by trips to Europe. He provided a wide range of professional services from his premises and actively supported local musical, social and humanitarian organisations¹⁷¹.

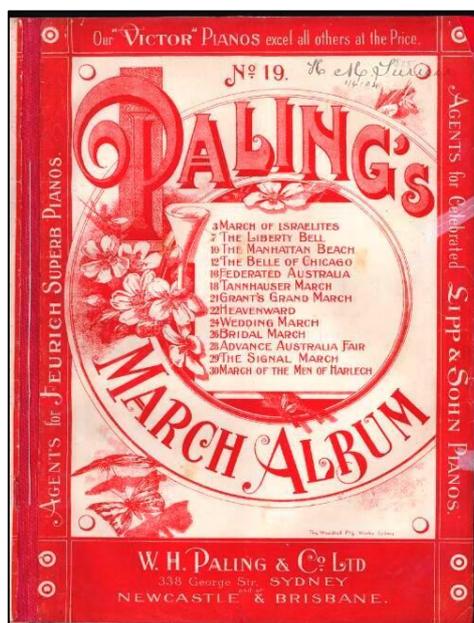


Figure 33 Paling's March Album, 1880s (National Library of Australia)

Paling's enthusiasm for civic and philanthropic activities won him many honorary public offices. He was made a Justice of the Peace in 1872 and regularly sat on the magistrates' bench in Sydney. He became Mayor of Petersham Municipality in 1881-82. In 1888, he presented to the colony his 450-acre model farm Grasmere at Camden, to be used as a hospital for convalescents and incurables, and then donated a further £10,000 for suitable buildings.

His last trip to Europe was in 1892, and in November 1894 he returned in failing health. He died at Stanmore in August 1895. His brother Richard John also migrated to Sydney, but moved to Melbourne and ran a music store and importing agency from 1857 to 1886. After becoming a partner in William's firm, he returned to Sydney. Richard died at Bondi in 1914¹⁷².

Nicholson & Co

James Charles Wilson Nicholson (1837-1907) was the son of a piano and organ manufacturer in Bradford, to whom he was apprenticed at the age of ten. In 1859 he migrated to Melbourne where he worked in music stores¹⁷³, including Joseph Wilkie (the founder of Allan & Co of Melbourne)¹⁷⁴ before combining with Eugene Ascherberg (1844-1908) to establish Nicholson & Ascherberg in 1873¹⁷⁵.

Nicholson & Ascherberg opened a pianoforte and music warehouse at 317 George Street in Sydney (taking over Jacob R. Clarke's music warehouse), while still operating at 45-47 Collins Street in

Melbourne¹⁷⁶. Eugene Ascherberg managed the Sydney store while Nicholson looked after the Melbourne store. Two years later Ascherberg was incapacitated by a severe accident and retired¹⁷⁷.

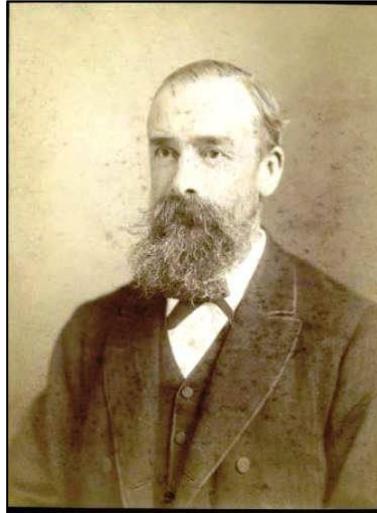


Figure 34 James Nicholson (National Library of Australia)

After Ascherberg's departure in 1878, Nicholson moved to larger premises in Collins Street, where he had many departments including sales and repairs. The business grew rapidly, so that by 1880 most cities had a Nicholson & Co store. At the end of the golden boom in 1894 he closed his Melbourne store and moved to Sydney. His son Louis Edwin managed the store there until 1939 when it was sold to Allan's Music, who retained the Nicholson name. When it was later sold to Palings, the name was discontinued¹⁷⁸.



Figure 35 Nicholson's Music Store Sydney, c1905 (National Library of Australia)

James Nicholson died at his home in Randwick in September 1907, aged 69. By the time of his death, he had become a household name in musical circles, and ran the major publishing house to emerge during the 1870s, publishing both reprints of British works and original items¹⁷⁹. During his career, he made frequent visits to Europe and America, studying his area of business, especially the manufacture of pianos and organs¹⁸⁰.

J. Albert & Son

Jacques Albert (1850-1914), was a Swiss horologist (clockmaker) who arrived in Sydney in 1884 with his wife and children. He founded a violin importing and watch repairing business in Newtown in the late 1880s, where the sound of his violin playing attracted music lovers to his shop. He moved into King Street in the city in the 1890s. His son Michel Francois (Frank) (1874-1962), joined the business and it became J. Albert & Son¹⁸¹.

By 1896, Jacques had retired and Frank became sole proprietor in what had become a music selling and publishing business that continued to trade under the same name. He expanded the firm and made licensing arrangements with overseas publishers for Australia and New Zealand¹⁸².

In 1897, Albert's released the Boomerang mouth organ, which was an immediate hit with the Australian public, selling an estimated 44,000 in the first year¹⁸³. It was compact, portable, tuneful and cheap, and was sold under catchy local names such as the Woolloomooloo Warbler and the Kangaroo Charmer. These became so successful that the Boomerang became the company logo after 1900.



Figure 36 Boomerang mouth organ (Facebook user)

Tin whistles, accordions and the famous *Boomerang Songster* lyric books also carried the brand. During World War I, Boomerang mouth organs played by the Anzacs provided a welcome distraction from the rigours and tedium of war. Ironically, they were made for Alberts by the German manufacturer C. A. Seydel & Son of Klingenthal in Saxony. From about 1924, Alberts produced an instrument that was actually shaped like a boomerang, complete with a similarly shaped box¹⁸⁴.

By 1902, J. Albert & Son had diversified into music retail and publishing, opening a shop in King Street, Sydney. Later the company struck deals with American and British publishers, purchasing the

rights for the songwriters Irving Berlin and George Gershwin. In 1926 the company founded the Australian Performing Right Association (APRA).

In 1929, Frank Albert became a director of the Australian Broadcasting Company Limited, formed by his company with Union Theatres which tendered to the Commonwealth government to provide radio programmes and ran the National Broadcasting Service. At the end of their contract in 1932, the government set up its own authority, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (the modern ABC). Albert's then acquired the licences of 2UW in Sydney and stations in Queensland. In 1933, J. Albert & Son gave up retailing to concentrate solely on music publishing. Frank Albert died in January 1962 at his home, Boomerang, in Elizabeth Bay, where he had lived since 1902¹⁸⁵.

In 1963, Ted Albert (1936-1990) founded the independent record label Albert Productions to exclusively sign and record Australia pop artists. In 2016, Alberts was acquired by BMG Rights Management, although the Albert family retained the rights to some of the more successful recording artists. In 2001, Alberts formed an alliance with Stuart & Sons to manufacture hand-crafted pianos.

The company founded by Jacques Albert in the 1890s became one of the foremost publishers of Australian popular music after a modest beginning in the nineteenth century. Their legacy continued into the late twentieth century with the active promotion of the Australian pop and rock music industry by his grandson Ted Albert.

A family piano

Travels of a piano

This is the history of my family's piano. It was an upright Stelzner-branch piano that was constructed in 1958 by the Kemble Company of London. It had 85 keys (the white keys were ivorette), two pedals, and stained in Regency Mahogany. It was purchased from B. B. Whitehouse & Co of George Street, Brisbane in 1958 or early 1959. The brand and retailer are marked on the front of the piano, while the English maker, date of manufacture and white key material were recorded on an order slip attached inside the keyboard.



Figure 37 Stelzner piano, 1950s

The colour of the stain was written on a job card that had been cut up and packed under the keyboard panels to stop vibration (along with two Player's Navy Cut cigarette packets, from the Castle Tobacco Factory in Nottingham, England). The cost is not known, but the last newspaper advertisement seen for that model in March 1955 quoted a price of £288 from Bert Denis of Beaudesert, agents for B. B. Whitehouse¹⁸⁶.

The piano was transported to Adelaide in mid-1959 when the family moved there after my father, who was a broadcast engineer for the Post Master General's Department, was transferred there. I had two piano teachers in Adelaide, the first being Otto Hermann Jacobs (1906-1962). He was the music teacher and conductor at Scotch College from 1945¹⁸⁷, which I attended between 1960 and 1964. My father hired him to teach both my younger sister Betty and me for a couple of years. He usually came to the house before school in the morning, and sometimes I went to his home in Goodwood for theory instruction.

After Otto Jacobs died, I was taught by a local neighbourhood teacher, Victor Hermann Appelt (1893-1975). He was born in Kapunda in the Barossa Valley of German descent, and I walked a few blocks to his house for lessons. I was happier learning from him because he was a kinder and more patient teacher than Jacobs. I continued music lessons to grade five level and gave them away at about age seventeen. Betty and I both sat for the Intermediate level music exams (third year of high school). Betty practised doggedly and passed the exams, but never looked at the piano again. I just

tinkered around with various pieces I was interested in and failed the exams dismally, but continued to play the piano all my life – I'm sure there must be a lesson there somewhere.



Figure 38 Otto Jacobs' marriage, 1946 (*The Mail*, 28 December 1946)

The piano remained at the family home in Plympton Park until it was moved to my apartment in Payneham in about 1973. I was the only family member who was still interested in playing it, so it was effectively given to me at that time. When I went overseas for four years in 1979, the piano went back to my parents' house. But when I returned to Australia and moved to Sydney, it was sent to my house in Enmore in about March 1984. In 1997, it was moved to its current home in Surry Hills.

The piano was tuned occasionally, and a few keys were repaired when their action became faulty. This gradually worsened, and by about 2014, so many keys had faulty actions that the piano was almost unplayable. I was quoted about \$1,500 to repair the keys (around the value of the piano itself), but with no guarantee that this would produce a good result. So I decided to move forward and replace the old piano with a Yamaha Clavinova digital piano from Hutchings Pianos in Woollahra.

The agreement with Hutchings was that the old piano would be taken away when the new one was delivered in June 2014. But while I was waiting for delivery, I decided that as I'd had the piano for most of my life, I didn't really want to part with it. So I spent several days pulling it apart, and eventually handed the very heavy iron frame and hammer assembly to the delivery guys on receiving the new piano, while keeping the keys, the copper-wound strings and all the woodwork.



Figure 39 Piano order slip, 1958



Figure 40 Piano packing material, 1958

Dismantling the piano proved to be quite a challenge, as I found that it was very well glued and screwed together. There were no Philips head screws, and the flathead screws of 1958 had narrower slots than today, meaning that I had to use a smaller screwdriver than expected, so it took more effort than usual to undo the large screws connecting the iron frame to the backing board. Removing the strings from the frame was an even bigger challenge, as I only had a multigrip wrench to slowly unwind the pins, and ended up cutting most of the strings with pliers. I read afterwards that this was a dangerous thing to do because of the many tons of tension on the strung frame, and I should have cut the strings randomly throughout the frame rather than working from one end to the other.

The final challenge was what to do with the old wooden frame. A search of the internet revealed a variety of options, such as an outdoor garden feature, a drinks bar, a book case or a computer desk. The latter seemed the most useful idea, so I spent a couple of weeks (starting with no idea of what I was doing) figuring out how to fit the different panels together and adjust them to make a flat surface suitable for all the paraphernalia of a modern computer work station.



Figure 41 Piano as computer desk, 2014

The new desk was raised a few centimetres to reach a comfortable height, the pedals removed (I found that they got in the way) and a row of black and white keys attached to the sides for decorative effect (and as a reminder of the original use). The four-sided frame was carried upstairs to my room and the rest of the panels attached there. It was put together so that it could be

dismantled one day and moved to a new location (for which I will need to carefully document the disassembly, to reverse the process later).

B. B. Whitehouse & Co.

Benjamin Burton Whitehouse (1860-1874) was born in Lancashire, the son of an organ builder. After learning his father's craft, he migrated to Brisbane in 1883¹⁸⁸. From 1888, he worked for W. H. Paling & Co as a piano tuner and repairer, and by 1891 was travelling to Queensland country towns tuning local pianos¹⁸⁹.

In February 1893, a series of tropical cyclones caused the Brisbane River to burst its banks three times during that month, then a fourth time in June, leaving up to a third of Brisbane's residents homeless and destroying both of the bridges that crossed the river. B. B. Whitehouse's residence was swept away in one of these floods¹⁹⁰, and he was declared insolvent in March 1893¹⁹¹.

By February 1895, he was working for himself, tuning and repairing pianos and organs, advertising that he had been head tuner and repairer for W. H. Paling & Co for seven years¹⁹². The following year, he moved to larger premises in the Treasury Buildings in George Street, where he advertised pianos and organs for sale, while continuing his repair business¹⁹³. Benjamin combined with John Samuel Marlor to form the company Whitehouse & Marlor, whose music warehouse was first advertised in Jun 1896¹⁹⁴.

In 1897, Benjamin was joined by his younger brother Joseph Howell Whitehouse (1874-1954) and they began installing organs together¹⁹⁵. By May 1898, Whitehouse & Marlor were advertising pianos by Ronish, Bluthner, Haake¹⁹⁶. Canadian-made Bell pianos were added to their range, and this became the main advertised band for some years¹⁹⁷. The first advertisement for Stelzner pianos appeared in October 1899, where it was sold alongside Ronisch, Bluthner, Broadwood, Collard, and Roder pianos¹⁹⁸.



Figure 42 First Stelzner piano ad, 1899 (*Brisbane Courier*, 25 October 1899)

In June 1902, Whitehouse & Marlor dissolved their partnership, and the business was carried on by Benjamin Whitehouse alone as B. B. Whitehouse and Co.¹⁹⁹. By 1905, the company was advertising that Stelzner pianos were specially made for the company, who were sole agents²⁰⁰. In November 1906, an advertisement appeared in the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* describing a Stelzner piano from Berlin with an iron frame, an under-damper, using the Lipp System, and finished in walnut or rosewood²⁰¹.



Figure 43 B. B. Whitehouse & Co logo (Facebook user)

An article in the *Brisbane Courier* in December 1906 mentioned that B. B. Whitehouse & Co had made “great strides in business”. Their principal agencies were John Broadwood & Sons Ltd of London, W. Bell & Co of Guelph Canada, F. Stelzner of Berlin, and that Stelzner was a medium-priced piano²⁰². Then in 1909, an advertisement for the company stated that Stelzner was one of the oldest makers in Germany, and that their pianos would withstand the Queensland climate²⁰³. Twenty years later, a news article stated that German Stelzner pianos were aiming to capture the world market in the low-price class with factories in England, Germany and America. B. B. Whitehouse had been sole agent for 30 years (that is, since about 1899) and its showrooms were then at 193-185 George Street²⁰⁴.

By 1939, B. B. Whitehouse frequently advertised reconditioned Stelzner pianos²⁰⁵, and the main selling point from then on was their “golden tone”²⁰⁶. From about July 1939 through to 1948, a series of amusing advertisements for Stelzner pianos appeared in *The Telegraph* in the form of short news stories²⁰⁷, for example:

- FIREMAN ARRESTED FOR SPEEDING – was hurrying home to hear his new Stelzner Piano from Whitehouse’s (July, 1939).
- MISSING WOMAN SAFE. Found admiring the beautiful new golden-toned Stelzner Piano at Whitehouse’s (September 1939).
- HIGH COURT JURY DISAGREES – but pianists agree that the Stelzner Piano is a wonderful buy at Whitehouse’s (September 1939).
- CYCLIST BREAKS ALL RECORDS – wanted to get to Whitehouse’s to purchase a Stelzner Piano (February 1940).
- WAITRESS RESENTS COMPLAINTS. Customers who complained of lack of service and half-cold meals at city café heard waitress indignantly blame the kitchen staff, who spent hours at Whitehouse’s playing the new Stelzner Piano (September 1940).
- PLANE LANDS IN CITY STREET. Pilot wanted to see the new golden-toned Stelzner Pianos at Whitehouse’s (October 1940).
- TRAIN LEAVES BRISBANE FOUR HOURS LATE – driver was at Whitehouse’s listening to the glorious tone of the Stelzner Piano (November 1940).
- SOLDIER MISSING. Eventually discovered playing latest popular airs on a golden-toned Stelzner Piano (January 1941).
- PRIZE FIGHT CANCELLED. Pugilist refuses to train for bout, instead spends hours with his new golden-toned Stelzner Piano from Whitehouse’s (May 1941).

- IF CHOPIN WERE ALIVE, he would be enraptured with the glorious golden tone of the Stelzner Piano from B. B. Whitehouse (September 1946).
- FALSE NOTES ISSUED. But they were definitely not from a golden-toned Stelzner Piano from Whitehouse's (January 1946).
- Benjamin Whitehouse died in Brisbane in January 1954, aged 93. He was a pioneer in inducing English and German piano makers to build pianos which would not deteriorate in the Queensland climate, and took an active interest in the company he founded until about two years before his death²⁰⁸.

Stelzner pianos

Despite a fair amount of research, the origins of the brand name Stelzner have proved to be elusive. The name is likely to be taken from Alfred Stelzner (1852-1906), who was born in Hamburg and educated in music, physics and mathematics. An article by Dr. James Christensen on the website dedicated to the German composer Felix Draeseke gives a comprehensive summary of Stelzner's career as an inventor and maker of string instruments. He manufactured instruments in his first factory in Weisbaden from c1890, and then moved his operations to Dresden in 1893. Over 300 were made and sold around the world.



Figure 44 Alfred Stelzner (Wikimedia)

In 1894, a bankruptcy hearing was announced for his firm, but he continued to produce instruments as late as 1899. The disgrace of his overwhelming financial difficulties led to his suicide in July 1906. Apart from a visit to the Bechstein piano factory in London in 1891, there is no mention of any but string instruments²⁰⁹.

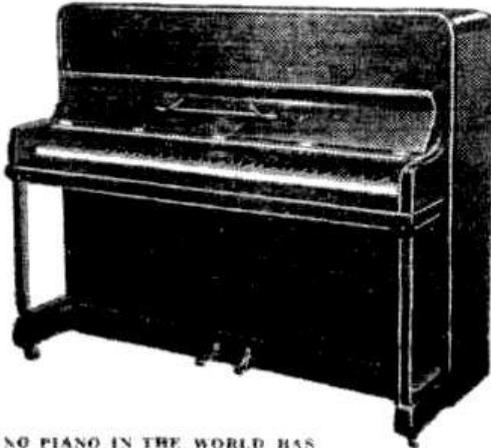
Stelzner invented two string instruments, the violotta (which is tuned an octave below the violin, and fits between a viola and a cello) and the cellone (a large cello)²¹⁰. These instruments received some praise and endorsements at the time of their invention, but very little music was ever written for them, and they seem to only survive in museums today.

B. B. Whitehouse began selling Stelzner-branded pianos in 1899²¹¹, and mentioned in 1905 that they were specially made for the company²¹². It was then claimed in 1909 that Stelzner came from one of the oldest makers in Germany²¹³.

From all of this, I think that Stelzner must be what is called a “stencil piano”, which is a brand name owned by a company who then licenses another company to make pianos for them. A number of websites on the history of piano brands point out that there are far more piano brands in the world than there are factories to make them in. “Stencil” brands are applied either to old brand names that are revitalised to give an air of heritage to a new piano line, or to pianos made specifically for an individual dealer or shop. B.B. Whitehouse effectively admitted that Stelzner pianos were made to his specifications to withstand Queensland’s hot and humid climate.

Not even the Pipes of Pan
could match

STELZNER'S
GOLDEN TONE



NO PIANO IN THE WORLD HAS
A FINER TONE THAN STELZNER

Stelzner's magnificent Golden Tone cannot be matched by any other piano or instrument. It has an irresistible appeal for music lovers. Sturdy iron frame, extra heavy tropical construction and a comparatively low price have made it the most popular piano on the market. Priced from £ 288, and on terms that make ownership easy.

SOLD AND SERVICED BY THE PIANO SPECIALISTS
B. B. WHITEHOUSE
& CO. PTY. LTD.
GEORGE ST. (opposite Treasury Bld) BRISBANE

Figure 45 Whitehouse Stelzner ad, 1954 (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 4 October 1954)

It is not known who the manufacturer was for the first few decades, but eventually the English Kemble Company took over the manufacture of Stelzner pianos for Whitehouse, and this is the origin of my piano in 1958. Michael Kemble founded Kemble Pianos in 1911 in Stoke Newington in North London, which was known as the centre of the United Kingdom piano manufacturing industry at the time. In the 1950s, his descendant Robert Kemble took over the business and moved it to a new factory at Bletchley, near Milton Keynes. The Kemble family went into partnership with Yamaha in 1968 to establish Yamaha-Kemble Music²¹⁴.

The Dutch piano tuner and historian J. van Medevoort has created a comprehensive online database of piano brands, and he has some brief information on the Stelzner brand. He records that in Germany the brand was owned by Stelzner and made in Dresden. It was also associated with a factory in London, England, and in Australia it was associated with the Wertheim Piano Factory, which was established in 1908 (he says in Sydney, but Wertheim was a Melbourne company)²¹⁵. I don't know if this contributes anything new to the origin of the Stelzner brand.



Figure 46 Stelzner piano logo (Facebook user)

Notes

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- ¹ Yamaha Australia website.
 - ² A J Youngson, *The Scientific Revolution in Victorian Medicine*.
 - ³ M. J. Peterson, *The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London*.
 - ⁴ Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*.
 - ⁵ S. de Vries, *Females on the Fatal Shore: Australia's Brave Pioneers*.
 - ⁶ A. Frost, *The First Fleet: The Real Story*.
 - ⁷ S. Macarthur-Onslow, *Some Early Records of the Macarthurs of Camden*.
 - ⁸ P. Clarke and D. Spender, *Life Lines: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries, 1788–1840*.
 - ⁹ Geoffrey Lancaster, *The First Fleet Piano, a musician's view*.
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