

**The Australian ‘first fleet’ piano, Frederick Beck (1780); a research project**

Like many inquisitive ten-year-old boys, I enjoyed pulling objects that I found around the house to pieces. This included the much-loved family piano. I had just witnessed this piano being disassembled by a piano technician who had been tasked with assessing the instrument's condition by my music teacher. Once the technician had re-assembled the piano and left, I successfully mimicked the piano's disassembly. I was, however, unable to return the multitude of now disassembled parts back to their previous state. My mum—being the teacher—instead of calling the technician to return and restore the piano to a functional state, arranged for me to attend his workshop each afternoon after school to learn how to reassemble the piano under his tutelage. These fortuitous beginnings led me to a music scholarship and, in 1977, I started traditional master/apprentice training in a leading piano workshop in Perth, Western Australia.

For over forty years, I have prepared and maintained modern acoustic pianos for domestic and institutional clientele, including eminent pianists such as Angela Hewett and Ray Charles. In 1997, world-renowned early keyboard specialist Professor Geoffrey Lancaster AM requested that I prepare his fortepiano for recordings and performance. This once again ignited my inquisitive nature; this time, to investigate early keyboard instruments. In 2017 I received a Churchill Fellowship to investigate keyboard instrument conservation techniques throughout the UK and Europe. Over three months in 2018, I visited many keyboard collections, workshops, and makers to research the methods by which valuable instrument collections could be maintained into the future. This objective—to find a solution to the paucity of appropriate training of traditional technical skills—was despondently confronting, with very few opportunities in sight to train the next generation of keyboard technicians. Today, there is currently no appropriate training course or apprenticeship available in Australia. The opportunities afforded to me—that is, a chance to receive training in traditional technical crafts—are no longer available.

Following my Churchill Fellowship research and the dissemination of my findings of on the preservation of an endangered traditional craft, I was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Founding Pianos Scholarship (Edith Cowan University) to undertake a Masters/PhD, conducting research into the square piano that travelled from England to Australia as part of the First Fleet.

On January 26 1788, this fleet of ships anchored at Sydney Cove, having journeyed over 24,000 kilometres from England. Onboard were sailors, military and civil officers, convicts, settlers, equipment, stores and a square piano built in 1780 by the London-based instrument maker Frederick Beck. This instrument is now part of the Founding Pianos Collection at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Western Australia. In March 2019, the ‘First Fleet piano’ returned to England to be restored by the eminent restorative conservator Lucy Coad, whose restoration of the instrument serves as a catalyst for my research. This research identifies and compares current restoration philosophies and provides a rationale for the restoration processes applied to the ‘First Fleet piano’. Within this research, I am constructing a record of the nature and origin of materials used in the instrument, as well as those used in previous restorative interventions. I also provide descriptions of the assessment procedures carried out to determine the instrument's condition and materials. Examination of other extant square pianos by Beck is carried out in order to identify his governing design and manufacture principles.

The aim of this research is to establish a resource which may be used to develop the future of training in the field of piano restoration. The data concerning traditional intervention practices will serve to continue the voice of the piano in all its contemporaneous and contemporary incarnations. I would be very happy to correspond with other members on any or all aspects of this project.

Paul Tunzi [info@paultunzi.com](mailto:info@paultunzi.com)