Chapter 16

The History of George Bouchier Worgan’s Piano: A speculative summary

• Between 1780? and 1786?, perhaps before Wednesday, 1 November 1786, George Bouchier Worgan purchased his square piano, either new or second-hand, from Frederick Beck (at Beck’s workshop, 10 Broad Street, Soho, London).

• On Sunday, 13 May 1787, at three in the morning, the instrument departed from England for Botany Bay on board the flagship of the First Fleet, the *Sirius*.

• Eight and a half months later, at approximately seven in the evening of Saturday, 26 January 1788, the instrument arrived at Sydney Cove. It is not known exactly when the instrument was offloaded from the *Sirius*, but Worgan’s square piano had been taken off by Saturday, 6 March 1790. Nor is it known where the instrument was housed for the three years between its arrival at Sydney Cove and early 1791.

• Between January and Monday, 7 March 1791, the piano was placed in John and Elizabeth Macarthur’s new thatched wattle-and-daub hut at Sydney Cove. This hut may have been located up the hill to the west of the fledgling colony’s parade ground (at what is now the corner of Bridge and George streets).

• George Worgan gave the instrument as a gift to Elizabeth Macarthur between January and ca Monday, 7 March 1791.

• In November 1793, the piano was placed in John and Elizabeth Macarthur’s new cottage, Elizabeth Farm, at Parramatta.

• Between Sunday, 4 March and Monday, 5 March 1804, Worgan’s piano escaped destruction by fire within the context of an uprising by Irish convicts.

• On Saturday, 26 January 1805, Worgan’s piano once again escaped destruction—from a fire that broke out in the kitchen of Elizabeth Farm cottage.

• On Thursday, 4 January 1810, Elizabeth Macarthur may have sold Worgan’s piano to David Bevan (auctioneer) as part-payment for the purchase of a piano from Thomas Laycock’s estate. If Elizabeth Macarthur sold Worgan’s

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1 This information is derived from a conversation between the author and Gary Crockett, Curator, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Queens Square, Sydney, on 11 February 2010.
piano to Bevan on this date, the instrument remained in his possession until
it was (presumably) sold approximately three months later, on Monday,
2 April 1810.

• On the other hand, Worgan’s piano may have remained at Elizabeth Farm
cottage, becoming one of two pianos in the possession of Elizabeth Macarthur.

• It is not known what became of Worgan’s piano either during the five-year
period between Thursday, 4 January 1810—when Elizabeth Macarthur
bought a piano from Thomas Laycock’s estate—and Saturday, 14 January
1815; or during the five-year period between Monday, 2 April 1810—when
Worgan's piano may have been sold by the auctioneer David Bevan—and
Saturday, 14 January 1815.

• Worgan’s piano may have been sold at auction by David Bevan on Wednesday,
12 January 1814—within the context of this auction, the maker of the
instrument and the vendor are unknown.

• On Saturday, 14 January 1815, the instrument was offered—according to
the first of six advertisements—for sale by the lawyer and merchant George
Chartres, at 68 George Street, Sydney.

• It is not known what became of Worgan’s piano during the two years between
George Chartres’ sixth and final advertised attempt to sell the piano—on
Saturday, 3 June 1815—and Thursday, 13 November 1817. The unsold piano
may have remained in the possession of George Chartres.

• On Thursday, 13 November 1817—one month before George Chartres’
departure from Sydney to England—Worgan’s piano was offered for sale
at auction—as part of Chartres’ trade stock—by Simeon Lord at Chartres’
residence—68 George Street, Sydney.

• It is not known whether the piano was sold at this auction. It is also not
known what became of Worgan’s piano during the 21 years between
Simeon Lord’s auctioning of George Chartres’ trade stock—on Thursday, 13
November 1817—and Wednesday, 6 June 1838.

• On Wednesday, 6 June 1838, Worgan’s piano was offered for sale at auction
by John Blackman, at his ‘Auction Mart’ salesrooms at 5 King Street, Sydney.
Hearsay suggests that the piano may have been purchased by the owners of
a farm 48 kilometres from Sydney.

Provenance Continued: Alternative one

• During mid to late October? 1973, the eminent Sydney-based antiques
dealer William Bradshaw was either ‘tipped off’ or saw an advertisement
concerning a ‘spinet’ for sale. It transpired that the spinet was in fact a
square piano made by Frederick Beck dated 1780/86?. The piano was located
in an old house on the outskirts of Windsor—48 kilometres from Sydney.
The instrument had been in the owner’s family since living memory—perhaps since John Blackman’s auction held on 6 June 1838?. The owners were adamant that the instrument had come to Botany Bay with the First Fleet. Members of the family were allowed to play the instrument only under strict supervision, because ‘it came out with the First Fleet’. The piano was housed in the laundry.

- William Bradshaw believed the instrument to be surgeon Worgan’s piano, and purchased it on Monday, 29 October 1973, at 11.30 am (Plates 133 and 328e).
- The current owner, Stewart Symonds, purchased the 1780/86? Frederick Beck square piano from William Bradshaw in mid-October 1986. Symonds saw it ‘in passing’ during one of his almost weekly visits to Bradshaw’s shop at 96 Queen Street, Woollahra. The instrument was, at that time, housed in the large freestanding, uninsulated brick garage and workshop at the rear of Bradshaw’s shop/home. Like Bradshaw, Symonds is convinced that the piano belonged to George Worgan.
- The instrument sits in the entrance hallway of Stewart Symonds’ home, where it nestles against the bent-side of a Joseph Kirckman grand piano dated 1809?.

**Provenance Continued: Alternative two**

It is not known what became of Worgan’s piano during the 135 years between Wednesday, 6 June 1838—when Worgan’s piano was offered for sale at auction by John Blackman—and Monday, 29 October 1973.

- The instrument *may* have passed into the hands of the composer Varney Monk, who lived near Sirius Cove, Mosman, Sydney.
- Eventually, the instrument passed into the hands of Adam Barber, who lived at 82 Murriverie Road, North Bondi, Sydney.
- On Monday, 29 October 1973, William Bradshaw purchased the Beck piano from Adam Barber.
- The current owner, Stewart Symonds, purchased the 1780/86? Frederick Beck square piano from William Bradshaw in mid-October 1986.
- The instrument sits in the entrance hallway of Stewart Symonds’ home, where it nestles against the bent-side of a Joseph Kirckman grand piano dated 1809?.

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Provenance Continued: Alternative three

It is not known what became of Worgan’s piano during the 148 years between Wednesday, 6 June 1838—when Worgan’s piano was offered for sale at auction by John Blackman—and mid-October 1986.

• The instrument may have passed into the hands of the composer Varney Monk, who lived near Sirius Cove, Mosman, Sydney.

• At some stage, the instrument passed into the hands of Adam Barber, who lived at 82 Murriverie Road, North Bondi, Sydney.

• On Monday, 29 October 1973, William Bradshaw purchased the Beck piano from Adam Barber.

• The current owner, Stewart Symonds, purchased the 1780/86? Frederick Beck square piano from William Bradshaw in mid-October 1986.

• The instrument sits in the entrance hallway of Stewart Symonds’ home, where it nestles against the bent-side of a Joseph Kirckman grand piano dated 1809?.

From the foregoing pages, it may be conjectured that the Frederick Beck square piano of 1780/86?, currently in Stewart Symonds’ possession, was brought to Botany Bay on board the flagship of the First Fleet, the *Sirius*, by surgeon George Bouchier Worgan. Even if it is later found that this particular piano did not arrive with the First Fleet, the existence in Australia of an instrument by Frederick Beck represents a unique part of the nation’s heritage. That this particular piano may be one of only 32 extant Beck instruments,2 and is the only extant late eighteenth-century fully chromatic five-octave compass square piano that has cabriole legs—hinged and incorporated into a campaign-furniture-inspired stand—further enhances its significance.3 Either way, the heritage value of the 1780/86? Beck square piano is both nationally and internationally inestimable.

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2 See ‘Extant Pianos by Frederick Beck’, in Chapter 2, this volume.
3 If the instrument dates from 1780, it is one of only two extant Frederick Beck pianos from that year; similarly, if the instrument dates from 1786, it is one of only two extant Frederick Beck pianos from that particular year.