



Charles Begg was baptised at Aboyne, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on 23 July 1825. He was the son of William Begg and his wife, Margaret Hunter. On 19 July 1855 at Old Machar, Aberdeenshire, he married Jessie Milne, daughter of Alexander Milne and his wife, Janet Begg. Charles and Jessie Begg had eight children, two of whom died in infancy.

Little is known of Charles Begg's early life. He served his apprenticeship in the piano manufacturing industry in Aberdeen, where he learned every stage of pianoforte construction and became a proficient craftsman. In 1849 he established his own piano factory there. The business prospered and he moved to a site in the centre of the city. He and his staff were able to increase their production to 35 pianos a month. Some of these instruments were brought to New Zealand by migrants.

In 1861 Charles and Jessie Begg and their two children sailed from Glasgow in the *Robert Henderson*, reaching Dunedin on 6 October. Within 24 hours of his arrival Charles Begg was at work tuning pianos. He became a familiar figure throughout Otago, where he travelled extensively, carrying his tuning and repair kit. He was said to have a remarkable ear. Without using a tuning fork he could distinguish between the various pitches to which a piano might be tuned.

Soon after his arrival in Dunedin Begg opened a shop in Princes Street, with an initial stock of four pianos. He also began building pianos. In the New Zealand Exhibition held in Dunedin in 1865 he was awarded a bronze medal for a piano of his own manufacture, with a rimu case and a sounding-board of Swiss pine. However, he did not consider New Zealand timbers particularly suitable for piano cases. As there was no machinery available for veneer making either, Begg decided to cease manufacture and concentrate on imported instruments and the retail trade.

A fire in April 1867 destroyed a complete block of buildings in Princes Street, including Begg's premises. Despite this serious reverse he built up a substantial business. Charles Begg and Company sold a wide range of sheet music as well as musical instruments, and operated a piano tuning and musical instrument repair service.

Charles Begg was described as 'a typical Northern Scot, of strong character and great determination, a practical expert in every branch of his trade'. He encouraged musical activity in Dunedin by allowing

the use of his premises for practice. Charles Begg and Company became a name synonymous with music making.

Charles Begg died in Dunedin at his Smith Street home on 21 December 1874. The family business was carried on by trustees, including Jessie Begg, until her sons Alexander and Charles were able to take over. Jessie Begg served as managing director for over 20 years and guided the firm's expansion. Between 1885 and 1900 branches were set up in Timaru, Wellington and Invercargill, with agencies in other towns. In 1903 a branch office was opened in London. Jessie Begg survived her husband by nearly 40 years and died in Dunedin on 23 January 1914.