

Family history in every brick

By Anne Beggs Sunter

THE real estate pages advertise an "outstanding CBD commercial opportunity", with the upcoming auction of a prestigious Sturt St building.

What many people will not know is that this building has a fascinating history.

Not only is it a key part of our musical history, but it incorporated some cutting edge technology thanks to Ballarat's great inventor, Henry Sutton.

Suttons Music Warehouse was built in 1891, at the time Ballarat's tallest building, and the first to incorporate an hydraulic lift.

Richard Sutton began his music business in Ballarat in January 1854.

His shop in Main Rd, near Humffray St, was the first in Ballarat to have a plate glass window.

The family business prospered, selling musical instruments and sheet music, and, by 1891, it had expanded to have stores in Melbourne, Bendigo and Sydney.

This three storey building celebrated the success of the music business at a time when

almost every home had a piano or an organ.

The establishment also sold a wide range of band instruments and sheet music, and had a large repair section.

After the death of Richard Sutton, his sons ran the business.

His son Henry was more drawn to science than to music. When in 1876 young Henry read about Alexander Graham Bell's discovery of the telephone, he immediately understood the invention and rapidly developed twenty telephones of his own design.

He put his improved version of the telephone to good effect, installing Australia's first telephone line between the music shop and the warehouse that greatly assisted the economies of the family business.

In 1883 he was invited to lecture in Applied Electricity and Magnetism at the Ballarat School of Mines.

While in that position, he developed his most astounding theory of television, and published his theory in scholarly journals in England, France and the United States.

His "telephane" system was described by his friend

W.B. Withers in his *History of Ballarat*, published in 1887. Withers referred to the "apparatus by which he hopes to be able to see here in Ballarat, by the aid of electricity, the race for the Melbourne Cup."

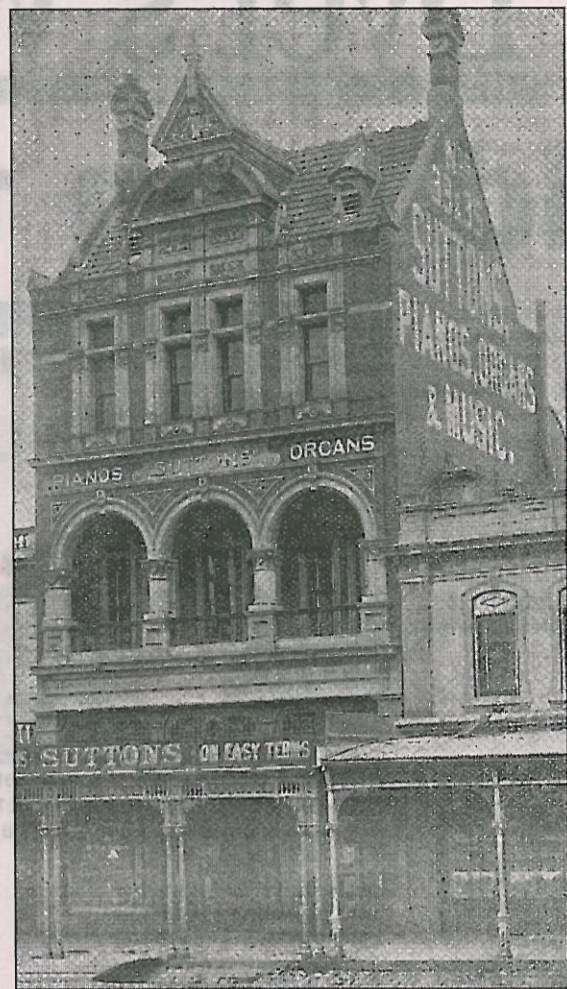
In 1926 John Logie Baird patented his system of television, adopting the ideas of Henry Sutton.

Of course the inventive Henry's ideas were incorporated into the magnificent new warehouse when it was built to the highest standards in 1891.

It was designed by local architects Gilbert and Clegg in "Queen Anne" style, featuring fashionable touches such as terracotta roof tiles, leadlight windows with portraits of Mozart, Brahms and Mendelssohn, and exquisite woodwork of kauri pine, blackwood and cedar.

Suttons Music became a leading supporter of the South Street Competitions, and sponsored the brass band competitions for many years.

Bands competed for the elaborate silver "Sutton's Shield". Tomorrow the band competitions will again be held beside Lake Wendouree.



FASCINATING HISTORY: The former Suttons Music Warehouse in Sturt St is coming up for auction.

The Sutton family later sold the building, and the business finally went into liquidation in 1998.

The building was owned by the State Electricity Commission for many years. In the early 1960s the chimneys and decorative pediment were removed, along

with all but one of the leadlight 'musician' windows.

I think it is a great shame there is no monument to mark the impact of this wonderful family on Ballarat's history. It would be appropriate for this building to be re-branded as "Suttons", as it was when it was built in 1891.

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