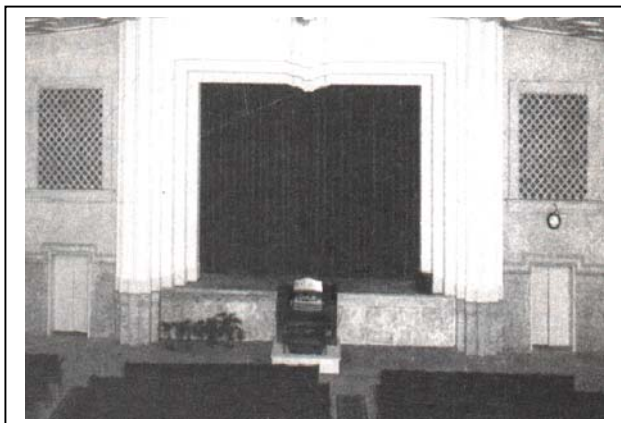


# Rod Blackmore's AUSTRALASIAN THEATRE ORGANS

## New South Wales section



*Best known location:*  
**Odeon (Duke of York) theatre**  
**Eastwood**

**Christie theatre organ**  
Order no. 314  
2 manuals, 7 ranks

**Now 2 manuals 10 ranks at**  
**Baptist Church, Epping**

The *Duke of York* theatre, Eastwood (a northwestern Sydney suburb) was opened in 1927. It was named after the Duke who later became King George VI and who had visited Australia that year to open the new Parliament House in Canberra. A 2/7 *Christie* theatre organ was installed, and opened by organist Stan Cummins on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1932. The organ had order no. 314 in the books of the Australian division of the English organbuilding firm *Hill, Norman and Beard*, and it is claimed that this was the first Christie to be wholly manufactured in Australia albeit with some imported parts. Remodelling of the theatre took place in 1938. Originally the console was on a small dais centrally placed immediately in front of the stage (see photo above); later it was moved to a position right of the stage. Two chambers, one either side of the proscenium, contained the pipework.

Organists who performed at the *Duke of York* included Penn Hughes, Brian Hatfield, Ray Chaffer, Cyrus Tuckwell and Pierre de Closay. The organ was closed down in September 1940 and remained silent until 1949. In the meantime the theatre had been absorbed into Greater Union's *Odeon* circuit in 1946. Organist Jack Pitt officially reopened the instrument on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1949 and it was played regularly on Saturday nights until 1956. In 1957 the organ was sold to Epping Baptist Church for 750 pounds. Epping is an adjacent suburb. The theatre was demolished after closing in 1973.

At Epping the organ was subject to restoration work and installed in two chambers (one within the other – an unusual arrangement). A silky oak cladding was built to enclose the console. It opened there on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1959, dedicated by organist Paul Edgar. Later, about 1967, when the church was enlarged, two adjacent chambers in the right-hand rear wall of the church were built to contain the pipework in a much more conventional arrangement, and in 1983 with three additional ranks (Concert flute, Trumpet and Open Diapason). The organ was also repitched. Most percussions and effects had been dispensed with when first installed at Epping, but some of these have been replaced. The organ is cared for by a group of Christie enthusiasts. As well as being played for church use there are concerts of theatre organ music. A new chamber in the left-hand side of the rear wall has been prepared, and it is planned to add 10 further ranks controlled by a 3-manual console.

Chamber analysis at Epping is as follows:

Main chamber: Clarinet, Violin, Dulciana Celeste, Concert Flute, Violin Diapason, Vox Humana, Trumpet.

Solo chamber: Open Diapason, Tuba, Tibia Clausa.

