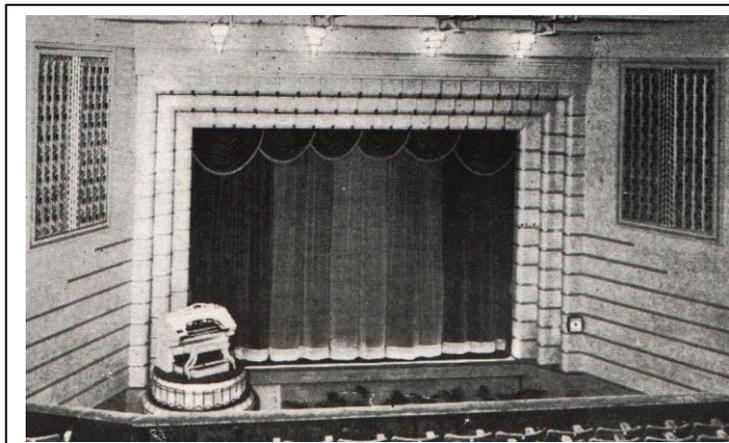


Rod Blackmore's
AUSTRALASIAN THEATRE ORGANS

New South Wales section



Best known location:
Savoy theatre, Enfield

Christie theatre organ
Opus No. 2720
2 manuals, 8 ranks

*now substantially owned by the Bendigo
Theatre Organ Society, Victoria, and awaiting
reinstallation*

This is the most-travelled theatre organ in Australia. It is also the first *Christie* theatre organ to have been imported into Australia from the English organbuilding firm of *Hill, Norman and Beard*. In 1927 it was ordered for placement in the *Regent* (later *Metro*) theatre in Perth, Western Australia. (The *Regent* instead installed a 2 manuals 7 ranks *Wurlitzer* theatre organ, opus #1728, opening on 25th August 1928.) By 1929 the *Christie* had been transferred to Hoyts *Deluxe* theatre, Melbourne, Victoria (with the order number “6” in the books of the Australian division of Hill, Norman and Beard), being opened there by organist *Charles Tuckwell*. By 1930 (order number 92) it had been transferred again, and installed in the *Plaza* theatre, Sydney, NSW, there to be opened on 11th April 1930 by organist *Eddie Fitch*. Eddie was succeeded by *Idwal Jenkins*.

The *Savoy* theatre, Enfield, a mid-western suburb of Sydney had been built in 1927, and was given an art-deco makeover in 1938. As part of the makeover the Christie organ was relocated from the Plaza theatre, the opening at Enfield being performed by organist *Denis Palmistra*. *Norman Robins*, *Jim Williams*, *Barrie Brettoner*, and *Ray Chaffer* were organists who also performed at the *Savoy*. As pictured above, the console was painted white, mounted on a cylindrical hoist with an illuminated opaque glass surround. The organ was contained in chambers on either side of the proscenium. The *Savoy* was part of the Western Suburbs Cinemas chain which was absorbed by Hoyts theatres in 1944. (The *Plaza* had replaced the Christie by bringing down from the *Wintergarden* theatre, Brisbane, Queensland, *Wurlitzer* theatre organ opus #748.) In 1959 the Christie organ was sold to *Franklin Baldwin* of Castle Hill for his residence, the theatre itself closing in 1960. The theatre still exists as a retail store. Baldwin in 1974 sold the organ on to *Geoff Smith* of South Australia who installed it firstly in his Fullarton residence, and later at Happy Valley. In 1994 the organ was acquired by the *Bendigo Theatre Organ Society* (Victoria) and is being incorporated into a 3-manual instrument to be located in the *Castlemaine* Town Hall. (Castlemaine is a town 40km south of the provincial city of Bendigo.) The Society also has the console and some ranks of the *Christie* organ formerly installed in the *Melba* theatre, Strathfield NSW.

Known pipe ranks of this Christie organ were:
Tuba, Tibia Clausa, Open Diapason, Clarinet, Flute
Viole d’Orchestre, Voix Celeste, Vox Humana.

Photo to right is the Christie in Geoff Smith’s residence, South Australia [acknowledgments to Ian McIver’s “Theatre Organs under the Southern Cross”] →



UPDATE (2015) – The Bendigo society was dissolved in 2006 and its assets (including the organ) were handed over to TOSA Victoria. In 2015 the organ has been acquired by the Australian Museum for Motion Pictures and Television in Perth, Western Australia