

Rod Blackmore's AUSTRALASIAN THEATRE ORGANS

New South Wales section



Best known location:
Kings Theatre, Gordon

Christie theatre organ
Opus no. 2743
2 manuals, 8 ranks

Now being reinstalled in the (new)
St. Columbs Church, West Ryde

Gordon is an upper North Shore suburb of Sydney. The *Gordon theatre* was built on the site of a former timber & fibro structure, *Empire Pictures*, that operated from 1919 to 1923. My great-uncle (Alfred Blackmore) was a director of Gordon Theatres Limited, and his wife cut a ribbon joining the stage curtains at the opening ceremony on 24th April, 1924. The building provided seating for 1362 and was used for various forms of live entertainment as well as films. By 1928 poor patronage forced a sale to Percival Garling (a later founder of Butler Air Transport) and the theatre was managed by his son Rus Garling. At a cost of 7800 pounds the management acquired the new 2 manual 8 ranks *Christie* theatre organ. This organ had originally been ordered for the *Lyceum* theatre, Sydney, but there had been a delay in its installation. The rear wall of the theatre was removed and two chambers, 2m deep, were added at about 2m above stage level. The console (a "D2" model) was located directly in front of the stage, on a platform at floor level in the centre of the sunken orchestra pit. This organ is numbered 84 in the order books of the Australian division of the English organbuilding firm *Hill, Norman and Beard*. The opening of the organ took place on Monday 14th October 1929 with local organ identity *Idwal Jenkins* at the console. Idwal remained until February 1931 when he went to the *Christie* organ in the *Plaza* theatre, Sydney. He was replaced by *Valda Kersey* (pictured above c.1932). *Horace Weber* made guest appearances. The theatre in 1934 was leased to the *Kings* chain of suburban cinemas, and new art-deco adornment of the auditorium was undertaken. It was a condition of the lease that there be a weekly organ performance of at least 25 minutes. Valda Kersey remained in residence through WWII, until *Lance Wells* took over in 1945. *Muriel Jeavons* (from 1946), *Percy Burraston*, *Owen Holland*, *Reubert Hayes*, *Gunnar Paulson*, and *Cecil Cranfield* also performed at Kings, Gordon. In February 1944 the theatre's lease was transferred to *Austral American Productions* although the *Kings* name remained. By 1948 ownership passed from Garlings to *Oscar Shaft* and in 1956 to *M.R.A. Pacey*. By 1956 the organ had remained silent for some years, and CinemaScope was then installed, covering the former orchestra pit and Christie console. The organ had been brought out and revived for about 6 months from July 1955. The final organist was *Ray Myers*. It had badly deteriorated and in 1958 was sold to *St. Columbs Anglican Church, West Ryde* there to be installed by parishioners in the multi-purpose hall that preceded the building of a new church. Two chambers were provided high up in the rear wall, and the largely intact organ sounded well as a theatre organ when played as such. Its use declined after the new church was built and it was bought in 1992 by the proprietor of the Service City Mechanical Instruments Museum at Alexandria. In the following year he offered it for sale to the Theatre Organ Society of Australia (NSW Division) and it remained in storage until 2012. The organ is now being reinstalled in the new *St. Columbs Church, West Ryde* by TOSA.

Basic ranks of this *Christie* organ are as follow:

Chamber No. 1: Open Diapason, Bourdon-Tibia, Clarinet, Tuba;

Chamber No. 2: Geigen Diapason*, Violone, Celeste, Vox Humana

(*although so labelled on the stoplist, this rank is actually a Flute)

Kings theatre closed in October, 1963 and was demolished.

Muriel Jeavons
at Kings Gordon →



The Christie at former St. Columbs' Church