

CHURCH TIMES

The lost painting of All Saints'

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Glyn Paflin explores this and other byways of ecclesiastical art

IT WAS almost the gift of bilocation. When the Bishop of Nassau, Roscow Shedden, celebrated a pontifical high mass in All Saints', Margaret Street, London, with a lay congregation, for the opening of the Anglo-Catholic Congress in 1920, there was at the same time a high mass in St Alban's, Holborn, for priests and bishops — and Bishop Shedden was photographed outside Staples Inn in the outdoor procession connected with *that* service. He must have been quite a mover.

To mark the Congress, the *Church Times* had just published a half-tone of Gerard Moira's painting of Bishop Shedden — blessing the Gospeller at All Saints' on St Peter's Day the previous year — as well as another of *Viaticum*, "the painting by A. Chevallier Tayler, exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1904". After my request for enlightenment about these paintings and their artists in the Diary ([14 August](#)), information was forthcoming from All Saints' and elsewhere.



Pontifical Mass — The Blessing of the Gospeller at All Saints', Margaret Street, St Peter's Day, 1919 by Gerald Moira, as it appeared in the Church Times in 1920. The painting itself is now lost



The Church Times half-tone of Viaticum by Chevallier Tayler

Sadly (though not all may agree), the Bishop Shedden painting is lost. It was given to the parish in 1937 in memory of the former churchwarden who commissioned and owned it, Robert Wigglesworth. I am told that it is understood to have hung on the top floor of 84 Margaret Street — which became the Institute of Christian Studies in the 1970s. During that iconoclastic decade, the painting was damaged by water and then disposed of. The present occupants are a Buddhist temple, who might not have wished to inherit it.

All Saints' itself, whose feast of title was celebrated there with something of the traditional stateliness last weekend, followed on Monday by an All Souls' sung requiem, complete with the return to use of a splendid catafalque and pall, is noted for being polychromatic; but then there are the vestments.

In *The Art of Gerald Moira* by Harold Watkins (1922), the painting, about ten feet by eight, is described as perhaps his most important single canvas, and the author gives us an idea of the colours. "Beneath the light of candles in gold candelabra and the swirling of the fumes of holy incense, the Rev. Geoffrey Heald kneels before the Bishop of Nassau. The Bishop, his strong, resolute face set off by his magnificent robes of gold with sleeves of chiffon shot with scarlet, recites the Gospel from the open page of a book held in the hands in the kneeling priest.

"Clad in robes of wonderful scarlet emblazoned with gold, the Vicar, the Reverend McKay, stands erect, hands clasped in prayer. The Master of Ceremonies, clothed in evening dress, survival of those days when his predecessors attended in full burnished armour, looks on, arms folded. . ."

"There is quite a lot of licence in both Moira's painting and Watkins' text," one of the current churchwardens, John Forde, tells me. "I am sure that the lace cottas on the servers were pure artistic invention."

In 1937, *All Saints' Parish Paper* reported that Mr Wigglesworth had paid Moira 400 guineas (more than £21,000 in today's values). The painting was exhibited in the Royal Academy, "in a most important position", but, owing to its enormous size, the only space that could be

found was at no. 84, “where the priests give us tea at ‘The Home’.” Gratitude was expressed to Wigglesworth’s daughter, Mrs Burton.

A surviving example of Moira’s work, Adrian Vincent, churchwarden of All Saints’, Woodham, in Surrey, says, is a then somewhat unconventional west window in that church by Moira, dating from 1900. The Vicar of the day, the Revd Percy Phillips, wrote in the parish magazine: “The artist, Mr. Gerald Moira, has promised to send a detailed description for publication in this Magazine — it has not arrived in time to find a place in this number. The treatment of the subject, which, as everyone can see, is the Three Archangels — Ss. Gabriel, Michael, Raphael — surrounded by Cherubim, with a representation of the fallen angel, will no doubt provoke some criticism, but we venture to think that time will justify the treatment.” There was criticism, and it does not seem that the artist’s description — perhaps because offence had been taken — was ever forthcoming.



West window by Gerald Moira at All Saints’, Woodham, in Surrey

Moira (1867-1959) was Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art (1900-22), and his windows for Scottish churches were made by Guthrie & Wells of Glasgow. His other windows in England included St Mary's, Albury (1909). Among works mentioned in the Watkins book are his contributions to the Canadian National War Memorial, and his Stations of the Cross for St Paul's, Knightsbridge, two of which are illustrated, as well as three of his 12 panels of ecclesiastics painted for the chancel of the same church.

The other artist, A. Chevallier Tayler (1871-77) — noted for his portraits of Lord Haig and Admiral Beatty — was a former pupil of Bloxham School. *Viaticum* hung for years in the *Church Times* office before the proprietor F. B. Palmer, a school contemporary, donated it, shortly before his own death, to the school, where it still hangs. I learn this from Robin Hillman, and from Simon Batten, who did his best to photograph this rather dark painting for us.



SIMON BATTEN *Viaticum* by Chevallier Tayler is still owned by Bloxham School

The Revd John Halkes was director of Newlyn Art Gallery, in Cornwall, from 1974 to 1990, and mounted exhibitions of the artists who became famous as the Newlyn School.

“Chevallier Tayler”, he writes, “was among the earliest, and then departed in the 1890s for the fleshpots of Kensington. He was a good painter and apparently charming company. But Stanhope Forbes, the doyen of the artists’ colony, thought that his main fault lay in going to church on a Sunday! Tayler painted a number of works on religious themes and entered the Roman Catholic Church in about 1887.”

Tayler’s other religious works included *Bless, O God, these gifts to our use*, and the *Last Blessing*. Although he is best remembered for his paintings of Cornish working people, he turned to lucrative historical subjects and cricket scenes, and, Mr Batten says, “His *Kent v. Lancashire* (1906), which hangs in the pavilion at Lord’s, sold in 2006 for £680,000, a record for a cricket painting.”

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