

Altar Rails in All Saints, Birchington

In 1938 the brass altar rails were removed, to be replaced by oak rails which were installed in memory of Florence Marion Taylor. The rails themselves were made by a local Birchington carpenter, whose name we unfortunately do not know.

The six columns on which the rails stand were designed by Robert Paine, the tutor in charge of the Woodwork Department at the Canterbury School of Art & Craft. Each of the six columns had two saints, placed back to back, representing the twelve figures on our reredos behind the altar, although they are not in the same order. The students who did the work are, like the Birchington carpenter, anonymous, but their skill in working with the oak panels is very obvious to us all. There is some slight confusion as to which saint is which, but we have been left a list by Alfred Walker¹, who may possibly have been given the definitive version by Robert Paine.

When the rails were completed and placed before the High Altar, Archbishop Dr Cosmo Gordon Lang came to All Saints to dedicate them.

In about 2000, Robert Paine's daughter, Sally Kington and her daughter unexpectedly visited the church, and asked to see what her father had been involved with. She had known about his project in Birchington for most of her life, but had never seen it for herself, so was thrilled to be able to see and photograph what her father's vision had achieved all those years ago. Amazingly the whole project appears to have cost just £20. This was almost certainly because the students – and perhaps Robert, too – donated their skills and time to the church.

When Sally Kington left that day, she promised to try and find out some more facts about the staff and the set-up at the time of her father's project on the Altar rails. Unfortunately she was unable to gather any additional information for us, much to her frustration and our disappointment.



¹ Alfred Walker came to Birchington in 1932 as the new headmaster of the CE Primary School in Park Lane. He became one of the churchwardens at All Saints and held that post for many years, later adding the job of Archivist to his repertoire.