

Captain Arthur Duckworth RN

Artist & Composer.

by A M Macfarlane

Location of plaque - Vauxhall Lane, Southborough.



Arthur Dyce Duckworth was born on 6 March 1896, the youngest son of Sir Dyce Duckworth Bt., physician to King Edward VII. He joined the Royal Navy, presumably at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, in 1908, aged only 12! He was present at the Battle of the Falklands (December 1914) and served at the Battle of Jutland (May 1916) on *HMS Lion* with the then Prince Louis Francis of Battenberg (later Mountbatten) with whom he kept in touch. During the Second World War he served on *HMS Warspite* in the Mediterranean and was present at the surrender of the Italian Fleet in September 1943. He retired from the Royal Navy in 1945 and became Secretary of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects until 1963.

As an artist he was virtually self-taught, painting in watercolours all his adult life and occasionally using oils. He painted many seascapes and recorded a number of actions and events at sea in which he took part. Many of his finest works were of the west coasts of Ireland and Scotland, usually making pencil sketches at the scene and painting later at home. He exhibited many times (24 pictures in all) at the annual exhibitions of the Royal Society of Marine Artists in the Guildhall, London, between 1950 and 1969 and at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1941 and 1944.

A pianist from his early years, he had very little formal training in composition and orchestral scoring. His first published work was "Five Songs from the Grand Fleet" (in which he was serving), written in 1917. His last was "A Soldier's Prayer", published the year he died. In between he wrote many songs, hymn tunes, anthems and light orchestral works, and 19 pieces were published. He won several competitions for composition including, in 1959, the Light Music Society competition for "A Theme for Variations"; variations on his theme were then written by twelve leading composers and the whole work was performed in the Royal Festival Hall later that year.

His most prolific years of composition were after his retirement in 1963. The BBC broadcast several of his orchestral works in 1966, 1967 and 1968; two of his concert marches were each performed three times and the attractive *Rigaudon* on five occasions. One of his popular works is the concert march *The Shipbuilders*, written in 1950 and first performed by the Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra in 1952. His wife, Grace, played the cello in the orchestra for many years.

He always wrote "a good tune" and some idea of the style of his music may perhaps be gauged from the fact that he was a great admirer of the music of Eric Coates and Roger Quilter.

Captain Duckworth lived in retirement at Aldershaw House, Vauxhall Lane, from at least 1954 until his death, where he is remembered by a Southborough Society green plaque.