

## **Ernest Arthur Rowe - Victorian Artist.**

**by A M Macfarlane**

**Location of plaque - Prospect Road, Southborough.**

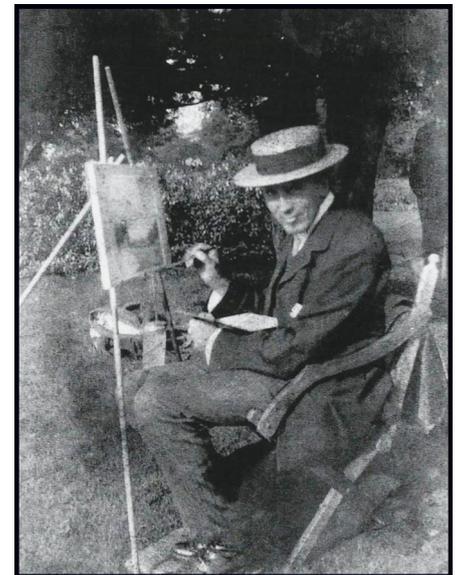


Ernest Arthur Rowe, always known as Arthur, was born on 21 August 1862 at Forest Lane, Stratford, Essex. He became a much-admired artist who specialised in painting the great formal gardens of England, Scotland and Ireland in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He studied for two years at the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colour, where he won the first (and only) President's Prize for Landscape, and then for ten years of evening classes at the Lambeth School of Art. He began to earn some money from his paintings, travelling widely by train and bicycle across Southern England, and one of his first subjects was Penshurst Place. He sometimes obtained commissions to paint a particular garden. At other times he painted "on spec" and was then able to sell something to the delighted owner.

By 1895 he had earned enough to pay off all his debts, but he was in poor health and developed tuberculosis. His doctor suggested that he should go to a sanatorium at Davos, Switzerland, which he did for five months. Whilst there, he met a young Australian nurse, Sophy, who eventually became his wife in 1899 (see below).

Meanwhile, he began to travel more widely, especially in Italy which became almost a second home.

In 1898, Arthur bought No. 42 Edward Street, Southborough, and moved there with his widowed mother and unmarried sister, Flo. He had always wanted to move out of London to where the air was cleaner, and he had numerous relatives living in the Southborough – Penshurst area. His health did improve, but the house was not large enough and, when his sister Bella died, Flo took on her three children and the house became rather overcrowded.



On 6 October 1899, Arthur married Sophy at Bourton-on-the-Water and they moved away for a short time but, by 1902, they had returned to Southborough and lived at No. 48 Prospect Road. His mother died in 1902 and is buried in the churchyard of St Peter's. His sister Flo and the children remained in Southborough until about 1924.

Arthur continued to travel and paint, and not only exhibited with success at the Royal Academy and elsewhere, but sold several paintings to Mary, Princess of Wales. He became wealthy enough by 1907 to build a house, "Ravello", in Manor Road, Rusthall, but the early years of the Great War affected badly his ability to sell his paintings and he had to sell up and move into rented accommodation in Tunbridge Wells where, on 21 January 1922, tuberculosis finally killed him. He was buried at St Peter's Church, Southborough, in the same plot as his mother. The grave is in a central position towards the west end of the churchyard, and Arthur's daughter, Christabel, was also laid to rest there in 1928.