

## ARTHUR WELLINGTON FOWLES – Marine Artist (1815-1883)

A. W. FOWLES was baptised at Ryde, Isle of Wight on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1815, he was the youngest son of William and Susan FOWLES (nee KEETCH). William had been born a British Subject in the West Indies and as a young man had come to the Isle of Wight and married Susan KEETCH in 1808. They had a fruit and poultry shop on the west side of Union-street, Ryde. In 1840 they gave up the business and William became the town crier. Susan died in 1841 aged 72 years and William retired as town crier in 1860 and died six years later aged 84.

Their son Arthur, who lived at home with his parents, was taught the trade of plumber. In 1838 he married a local girl, Sophia, daughter of John and Mary STRATTON. John had been a carpenter, but about 1816 he became an innkeeper and was landlord of Yelf's Hotel Tap in Union-street for many years.

A few years after his marriage, Arthur started his own business at 3 Cross-street, Ryde, as a painter, plumber and glazier, with the family living over the shop. About 1850 he gave up the business and in 1851 Arthur and his family moved to Charlton Cottage, George-street, Ryde. He became a marine artist and remained so for the rest of his life. In his obituary it was stated that he was self taught and had done drawing from an early age. His medium was oil, but later he also did water-colours. Although he painted sailing vessels of all sizes, he was at his best when portraiting yachts and his first important picture was of the 'Cambria', winner of the Ryde Town Cup. As a hobby he was a musician and was the organist for St. James's Chapel, Ryde, for 20 years.

Sophia gave birth to eight children, born between 1840 and 1857. One of the younger sons, Fredric joined the London and South Western Railway. About 1850, Sophia's father, who was by then a widower, came to live with the FOWLES and died at their home in 1855, aged 73 years. On the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1874, after a long illness Sophia died, aged 57 years.

In the Spring of the following year Arthur left his home for a few months, returning during the summer with a new wife, Emma. This lady was born at Whittington, Derbyshire in 1841 and she was to bear him four children between 1876 and 1883.

In the afternoon of Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 1883 Arthur FOWLES took his six year old son Edwin to Fishbourne to sketch some yachts in the creek. While he was occupied in sketching, his son found a loaded gun, on full cock, which had been left on some staging by a mariner, Robert FRY of Haylands, Ryde. The little boy handled the gun and it went off killing his father instantly. The verdict of the inquest was that Mr. FOWLES had been accidentally shot by his son and whilst no censure was passed on Mr. FRY, the jury urged him to be more careful in future. Arthur was well respected in Ryde and a large number of people attended the funeral on 30<sup>th</sup> January, when he was buried in the West-street Cemetery, aged 68 years.

Arthur's last great picture was of the sinking of the 'Eurydice' in Sandown Bay and the opinion of some judges at the time, was equal to anything he had painted.

After her husband's death Emma FOWLES advertised apartments in her George-street home. About 1883 she moved to 19 Nelson-street, Ryde, where she kept a lodging house. Emma died there and was buried in West-street Cemetery on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1929, aged 84 years.

Today Arthur FOWLES paintings are to be found in several museums and many are in private hands in the Solent area. They are much sought after and fetch good prices when up for auction. In at least two houses in the Ryde area he painted marine scenes on to the interior plastered walls.

*Details kindly provided by Mr. R. E. Brinton from his Biography of A.W.Fowles (April 1989)*

*Sources:*

*Obituary IW Times*

*Inquest IW Times.*

*Street Directories.*

*Census Returns.*

*Church Records.*