## **FEARNLEY, John Gillett**

[A Founding Member of the Beecroft Golf Club, 1906; Fearnley Park, Hannah-street, Beecroft, is named after him.]

John Gillett Fearnley was born at Preston, Lancashire, England, in late 1861, the son of Richard Eaton and Annie Elizabeth Fearnley.

In 1881 he was living with his parents and siblings at Denbighshire, Wales, and working as an ironmonger’s apprentice.**1**

About 1883 he settled in Cairns, Queensland, and became interested in shipping.**2**

On 8th January 1887, in Queensland, he married Margaret Mary Smith, daughter of James Thornloe and Pauline Smith.3

There were two children of the marriage: Ivy Lucielle (born 1888) and Norman Caton.

He was blessed with a good singing voice, and by 1888 he occasionally performed at concerts and was involved with the Cairns Liedertafel.**4**

In 1889 he joined W. C. Smith, under the title of Smith and Fearnley, merchants and importers, shipping and commission agents. W. C. Smith, a Cairns alderman, took a protracted holiday in September 1889.**5**

1890 was a busy year. John Fearnley was appointed a Justice of the Peace. He performed at the Cairns Liedertafel, to great applause. Also W. C. Smith headed south to live leaving John Fearnley in control of the business. He became involved in the Cairns Agricultural Society and the Cairns Benevolent Society. He also became an alderman in Cairns Shire Council.**6** [Many of John Fearnley’s community activities had also been shared by his partner, W. C. Smith.]

In 1891 John became a committee member of Cairns District Hospital. His solo at the Cairns Liedertafel was a triumph and received an encore.**7**

In 1892 the store and wharf of Messrs. Smith and Fearnley collapsed but was quickly restored. He was energetically involved in decorating St, John’s Church, Cairns, for the Easter Services, and Mrs. Fearnley was involved with its choir. He became secretary of Cairns Benevolent Society. His rendition of “The Death of Nelson” at the Cairns Liedertafel was a stretch for the limits of his voice.**8**

In 1893 John and his family went to live at Balaclava, a few miles outside Cairns. In 1895 there is mention of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Thornloe Smith returning to her daughter’s residence at Balaclava.**9**

In March 1895 he was initiated into the Freemasons. Lodge.**10**

In 1896 he was still involved in the Liedertafel and it was said of him that ‘he and others lifted the association to heights of fame’. He became an acting sub-lieutenant in the Queensland Defence Force (Marine).**11**

In 1897 he was a naval lieutenant in the Naval Brigade. He was also mentioned as the local agent for the Adelaide Steamship Company.**12**

In 1898 he had erected a wharf on his lease next to the Council’s wharf, 108ft long and 50ft deep.**13**

In 1899 he was appointed acting-lieutenant in the Queensland Defence Force (Marine), and later Officer Commanding Naval Brigade (Cairns Naval Cadets).**14**

In 1900 John Fearnley, Acting-Lieutenant in the Marine Defence Force, passed his examinations to become a lieutenant.**15**

In 1901 he was promoted to Commander of the Cairns Naval Brigade.**16**

1905 was an eventful year. He was appointed by the Government as a licensing justice for the Cairns District. He relinquished his position as Cairns agent for the Adelaide Steamship Company, and sold his wharf, sheds, offices, etc., to the Adelaide Company, but still retained his shipping, forwarding, and general agency business. He had been agent at Cairns for the Adelaide Steamship Company since 1893 but also held agencies for other shipping companies. He was also, at that time, President of the Cairns Agricultural, Pastoral and Mining Association, and Vice-Chairman of the Cairns Naturalists’ Club. The auction sale of the furniture and effects of Mr. J. G. Fearnley was held in October of that year. That month his daughter, Miss Ivy L. Fearnley, aged 17 years, being of a musical disposition, like her father, became Associate L.C.M. - Diploma of Associate of the London College of Music.**17**

In October 1905 it was announced that Mr. John Fearnley was leaving, indefinitely, for ‘the South’, en route to England. On 8th November 1905 the entire family departed for England. His send-off was extensively reported upon, his character and achievements lauded. The reason for his departure was that ‘he had been in the north nearly 23 years and he could not sacrifice his wife and family, to his own inclinations. It was because he felt this that he was taking them to a better climate.’**18**

His business interests were converted into a limited liability company in which a number of local businessmen will hold interests. The intention of the Company was to extend its operations considerably.**19**

In May 1906 it was reported in Cairns that he had taken a farm and market garden outside Sydney which he is putting in first-class order before leaving on a trip to Europe. The property in Hannah-street, previously occupied by Mr. W. W. Davis, was being renovated and added to considerably, while the grounds were being elaborately laid out, preparatory to Mr. Fearnley taking up his abode there. The additions and improvements would cost about £2500. Good bricklayers were advertised by the Burwood contractors, Shannon and Redwood.**20**

By August 1906 he had moved into his new house in Hannah-street.

‘The site of the new building is almost immediately opposite the now auxiliary reservoir, Pennant Hills road. The addition of such a magnificent structure to the architecture of the district is hailed with general and genuine satisfaction.’ He soon became a new telephone subscriber and was a candidate for ‘C’ Riding in the Hornsby Shire, to which he was duly elected. His business activities in Cairns continued as shipping agent for the China Navigation Co., and the North German Lloyd Co.**21**

His properties in Beecroft for 1907 were: Copeland Road, 11a 0r 15p; Welham Street, 70 x 90 (vacant house); Beecroft Road, 50 x 150 ft; Malton Road, 100 x 150 ft; Malton Road, 80 x 150 ft; Malton Road, 160 x 150 ft; Hannah Street, 66 x 264 ft.**22**

He became interested in golf and was on the committee for the Beecroft Golf Club from its inception in 1906.**23**

In 1914, at the outbreak of war, John Fearnley first served at Rushcutters Bay, later going to Newcastle as Sub-district Naval Officer, in charge of naval activities at this port. With warships burning coal, and a naval detachment stationed here, it was an important post; it became even more so when war broke out. As senior officer in the district, he was Provost Marshall, in charge of the local military police. He was officer in charge of transports, and handled all Navy business. Demobilised in 1919, he retained the office of Naval Coaling Officer. As such he became one of the best-known figures in Newcastle shipping circles. He was always keenly interested in defence matters, particularly the position in Northern Australia. He was always a vigorous advocate of greater defences here, and the more thorough charting of this part of the coast.**24**

In 1915 his daughter Ivy was, among other interests, involved with the Beecroft School of Arts. In 1917 Miss Ivy Fearnley was married to Gunner Douart Jameson, 7th Artillery Brigade, son of Mrs. Jameson, Warrangle Station, Mudgee. **25**

In late 1916 his son, Norman Caton Fearnley, of Beecroft, applied for exemption to serve in the war, stating that he was the only son of Commander J. G. Fearnley., R.A.N.R., who is on duty at Newcastle, and had been left to look after his father’s affairs as well as his own property. If he was compelled to serve it would mean financial loss to both [Exemption allowed.]

That year Mrs. Fearnley advertised for a strong youth as gardener and useful, able to drive.**26**

In 1919 Norman Fearnley was married to Leslie, daughter of Mr. William Black, of the Crown Law Office, Macquarie-street, Sydney, and Mrs, Black, Avoca, Turramurra. The address of Norman’s parents is given as ‘Rivington’, Beecroft.**27**

In 1930 John Gillett Fearnley was living in Newcastle, N.S.W.**28**

On October 6, 1937 John Fearnley’s wife, Margaret Mary Fearnley, died at her residence, Kurraba Road, Neutral Bay.**29**

Former Commander John Gillett Fearnley, R.A.N.R., died on January 1, 1938, aged 75 years, at Wahroonga Sanatorium. The remains will be privately cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium. He was survived by one son, Mr. N. C. Fearnley, and by a daughter, Mrs. D. McL. Jamieson, both of Sydney.**30**

**Bibliography**

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7 Cairns Post, QLD, Sun 4 Jan 1891; Cairns Post, Sat 16 May 1891

8 Cairns Post, QLD, Sat 2 Apr 1892; Cairns Post, QLD, Wed 20 Apr 1892; Cairns Post, QLD, Wed 18 May 1892; Cairns Post, Sat 6 Aug 1892; Morning Post (Cairns), Thu 9 Nov 1905

9 Cairns Post, QLD, Wed 8 Feb 1893; The Queenslander (Brisbane), Sat 4 May 1895

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22 Rate List for 1907 – Hornsby Shire Council

23 The Sydney Morning Herald, Mon 8 Apr 1907; Beecroft and Cheltenham: The Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914, pages 244-245

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27 Evening News, Sat 29 Mar 1919; The Mirror, Sun 6 Apr 1919

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**NOTE**: Additional information contained within Beecroft Cheltenham History Group book ‘Beecroft and Cheltenham, the Shaping of a Sydney Community to 1914’.