



ALSO

IN
REMEMBRANCE

GEORGE FENWICK

LOVED HUSBAND OF

JANE FENWICK

BORN IN SUNDERLAND

ENGLAND

2ND FEBRUARY 1847

DIED IN DUNEDIN

23RD SEPTEMBER 1929

AND OF

HIS BELOVED WIFE

JANE

DIED 21ST DECEMBER

1938

Fenwick, George 1847 - 1929

Printer, newspaper proprietor and editor, community leader

George Fenwick was born in Sunderland, Durham, England, on 1 February 1847, to Robertine Jane Brown, a stationer's daughter, and her husband, Robert Fenwick, a Chartist cabinet-maker. They and their four sons (three more children were to be born in the colonies) emigrated to Melbourne, Australia, in 1852--53, and were subsequently persuaded by the Otago immigration agent, W. H. Reynolds, to move to Dunedin, New Zealand, where they arrived in January 1856. After working as a contractor and timber merchant, Robert Fenwick became a hotel-keeper.

George attended a school in Lower High Street and J. G. S. Grant's Dunedin Academy. In 1859 he was apprenticed to the *Otago Witness*, and had to stand on a box to reach the composing frame. When the *Otago Daily Times* began in 1861 and the goldrushes drew off adult labour, Fenwick joined the new paper's job-printery. He later recalled watching Benjamin Farjeon compose his novels directly onto the stick, and remarked how the drive and ability of Farjeon and Julius Vogel influenced his own career.

His apprenticeship completed, Fenwick went briefly to Sydney, then joined the *Cleveland Bay Express and Northern Advertiser* in Townsville; but after his mother's death in October 1866, he returned to the *Otago Daily Times* the following February. A fellow compositor, James Matthews, had bought the *Tuapeka Press and Goldfields Advocate* and offered a partnership to Fenwick and a job to his younger brother William, still an apprentice. The offer was accepted, but Lawrence was too small for two newspapers and in 1869 they were happy to accept £150 from the rival *Tuapeka Times* to close down.

This set the stage for a legendary episode. On 15--16 October 1869 Matthews and George Fenwick visited Cromwell to size up prospects and met Robert Carrick, who was intending to set up his own paper. When Carrick agreed to desist, the others returned to Lawrence to complete the two issues needed to honour quarterly subscriptions, only to learn that Carrick was proceeding with his paper, the *Cromwell Guardian*, and on 1 November had announced publication for later that month. Helped by the *Tuapeka Times*, on 6 November Matthews and Fenwick printed a double final issue containing both Tuapeka and Cromwell news; they ran a new Cromwell masthead on half the edition, and at 6 p.m. Fenwick set off on horseback with 500 copies. He spent the night at Millers Flat, rode all day Sunday, and distributed his *Cromwell Argus* that night and next morning. He had a building ready in Cromwell when Matthews arrived by wagon with the machinery; and although the *Guardian* did set up business it was beaten off within weeks.

In 1871 George Fenwick was replaced in the partnership by his brother, William, who ran the *Argus* with Matthews until 1875. George joined John Mackay, later the government printer, in a printing business in Princes Street, Dunedin. On 20 August 1874 at Dunedin he married Jane Atlantic Proudfoot, sister of the prominent engineer David Proudfoot. The couple had eight children, two of the sons becoming well-known medical specialists.

In 1875 George Fenwick became manager of the *Otago Guardian*, but realised its finances were shaky and advised the directors to sell. The buyer, G. M. Reed, persuaded Fenwick to remain as a partner and save it. By 1877, however, Fenwick was convinced the cause was hopeless, and stunned Reed with a proposal to buy out the *Otago Daily Times* in a reverse takeover, achieved by raising £30,000 and using W. H. Reynolds as secret negotiator. The first issue under new ownership was 4 September 1877, although the imprint did not acknowledge the change until 8

October.

Trouble immediately followed. The *Times* printing staff, refusing to accept the dismissal of some of their members, broke away to found the *Morning Herald*; they were backed by angered members of the old board. With the penny *Herald* underselling the *Times*, cash in short supply, and the market affected by the City of Glasgow Bank failure, Reed and Fenwick were forced to create a public company. On 10 June 1878 the shareholders confirmed Fenwick as managing director and Reed as editor.

In the same year Fenwick helped initiate the New Zealand Press Association as a rival to the existing New Zealand Press Agency. The two groups merged in 1879 and Fenwick served on the committee of the resulting United Press Association. New premises, built for the *Times* at the foot of Dowling Street, were completed in August 1879. In February 1881 he persuaded his board to reduce the price to 1d., and an intense sales drive doubled city circulation and trebled country sales to end the *Herald*'s challenge. The 1880s depression caused an agreed 10 per cent cut in wages for 12 months, but the Otago branch of the New Zealand Typographical Association refused Fenwick's request for an extension, and striking staff from the *Times* again broke away, founding the *Daily News* which lasted only two months.

Fenwick combined paternalism with firmness in his staff dealings. In 1879 he initiated a mutual provident society at the *Times*, but he never bowed to threats. Years later he tried to prevent a journalists' union from becoming established at the paper, although he soon realised he had to concede the point. Generally, Fenwick strongly supported social justice - proven injustices, it was said, moved him visibly to anger - and in 1889 he led the famous *Times* crusade, based on powerful articles by his brother-in-law, Silas Spragg, against sweated piece-work labour in the clothing industry.

In 1890 Fenwick was appointed editor as well as manager, his immense drive and ability now being directed to every aspect of the *Times*'s operations. In 1894, as editor, he attacked conditions in Dunedin's slaughter-houses, causing a poll to establish public abattoirs. On the technical side he had added a lithographic department as early as 1879, and in 1897 visited the United States and Britain to buy the latest linotype machines. In his heyday he led the New Zealand newspaper industry, was founding president of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, and was prominent in the industry's professional organisations.

In 1909 Fenwick handed the editorship to James Hutchison, although in 1916 he showed he had lost none of his keenness when he scored a scoop for the London *Daily Chronicle* on Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic expedition. Even after William Easton succeeded him as manager in 1919, he remained managing director until his death at Dunedin on 23 September 1929. He was survived by his wife, who died in 1938, and six of their children.

George Fenwick's public service was considerable. He founded the Otago SPCA in 1882 to counter cruelty to horses; led newspaper crusades to fund the University of Otago, a women's hospital ward, the expansion of the University of Otago Medical School, and the Hocken Library (raising £1,000 himself the first day); supported unemployment relief in Britain; was president of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce and founding president of the Dunedin Rotary Club; and became director of various companies and office-holder in many welfare and cultural organisations, including the Prisons Board, YMCA, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, and the Patients' and Prisoners' Aid Society. Apart from once heading a licensing committee poll, he refused to take a direct part in politics, parliamentary or local.

Fenwick wrote widely, his articles and pamphlets reflecting his enthusiasm for tramping, natural history and travel; he also compiled the historical chronicle issued for the Dunedin City Council jubilee in 1915. In August 1919 he was knighted by the imperial government, the Prince of Wales

unexpectedly carrying out a private investiture on 20 May 1920 during his visit to Dunedin.

William Fenwick, George's brother, also joined the *Guardian* and the *Times*, and became editor of the *Otago Witness* in 1879. He greatly strengthened its farming and literary interest, and the paper grew rapidly in size and circulation under his control. He is best remembered for 'Dot's little folk', begun in 1886, which led children's journalism in New Zealand and was hugely successful. But he was overshadowed by his elder brother, who in a career of 65 years showed such capacity in commercial management, technology, newsgathering, social reform and editorial leadership that he still stands as one of the dominating figures in the history of the New Zealand newspaper industry.

GEORGE GRIFFITHS

Grinling, A. H. 'A personality behind the paper: Sir George Fenwick. Cameos in his career'. In *The Otago Daily Times diamond jubilee, 1861--1921*. Dunedin, 1924

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