

CAPTAIN JAMES HENRY FEARON

19 JULY 1863 – 7 AUGUST 1944

LACROSSE BUILDER



If you had to name only two people who were responsible for the success and longevity of the Williamstown Lacrosse Club you probably couldn't go past Captain James Fearon (President for 43 years from 1901-1943) or Mal Taylor, who played in Captain Fearon's Wanderers as a junior and came back to the club in the late 1940's as he knew the club was struggling to revive the game following WW2.

Much has been written about Mal Taylor but less is known about Captain Fearon given he died in 1944. He became involved with Williamstown Lacrosse Club in 1899 having never played a game of lacrosse but was a very community and sport minded person, extremely altruistic, and was always looking to provide opportunities for, and encourage, young people into sport and other community activities. Captain Fearon never played competitive lacrosse, probably because when he became involved with the club, the year after it was formed, he would have been 36 and perhaps too old, and "Missed the boat" so to speak.

James Fearon became a harbour or sea pilot in February 1901 at the age of 37, retired on 18 July 1928, was elected to the Marine Board in 1932 as a representative of the pilots and served on that Board until August 1943. He was the first Australian born citizen to receive a sea pilot's licence. His father arrived in Australia in the mid 1800's and was listed as a carpenter but then went on to be a shipwright when he

moved to Williamstown, so it was probably natural that young Jim had an interest in boats when he was a young lad, possibly worked in the business for a while before he became a sea pilot. This possibly explains how he could afford to transport lacrosse teams to places like Tasmania and South Australia as his father may well have built them or owned them.

Captain James H. Fearon lived on the corner of Thompson Street and Illawarra Street, Williamstown. A very public minded citizen, he took the lacrosse club to heart, was president for 43 years and along with years of service he sunk plenty of cash into the club, principally in taking junior and senior teams over to South Australia (Port Pirie), Western Australia and Tasmania to play lacrosse, as well as intra-state trips.

He wasn't just a figure head president, he was very active. As the late Ken Speakman noted "When I first started playing lacrosse the Willy ground was really a paddock. I think it might have just been called "The Gardens". Then they decided to level the whole thing out and make a proper playing field – that was about 1936 and it was at that time they renamed it the Fearon Reserve after Captain Fearon".

Captain Fearon started the ball rolling with junior lacrosse in 1929 and the numbers of juniors that turned up amazed the club officials, so much so that they had to make two teams. Mal Taylor was one of the boys in the early "Wanderers" teams that Captain Fearon initiated.

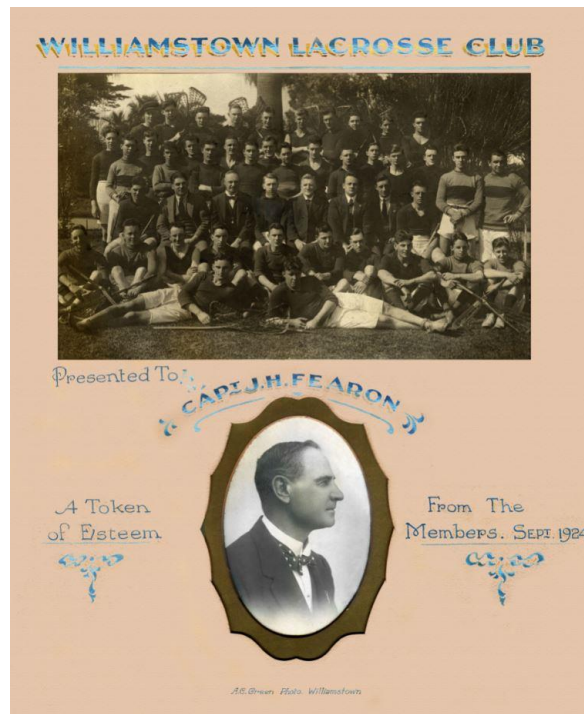
The "Skipper" as he was known was President of the WLC from 1901 until 1943, was President of the VALA from 1934-35, as well as being Vice-President for several years prior to that.

He was also Chairman of Williamstown Football Club, Vice-President of and delegate to the Victorian Football Association, Vice-president of the Victorian Junior Football Association, Commodore of the Williamstown Punt Club. The "Skipper" was the president of the Orientals Cricket Club and for 19 years president of the Old Myrtle Cricket Club (Later to become the Williamstown District Cricket Club in the Victorian Junior Association). He also was involved in the local sea scouts.

He was virtually president of everything Williamstown!

The following article on the 1923 season was reported in "The Australasian" on 15 September. "At the conclusion of the grand final match a new and valuable trophy, presented by Captain Fearon of Williamstown, for competition in the D Section, was presented to the D Grade team from Malvern, which became the first custodian of the trophy. Captain Fearon's support of lacrosse in the junior section had been most encouraging".

This was typical of the Skipper, he also presented a trophy for women's lacrosse in Victoria, as well as presenting a trophy to the W.A.L.A. in 1932 and is engraved "Premiers Lowest Grade" recognising the excellent performance of the Western Australian team at the Australian Carnival in 1932."



A further development was reported on 16 July 1932 where "Iroquois" reported "When the Tasmanian association requested that a team of A section or A and B combined, should be sent from Victoria to Tasmania, the Victorian association had little hope of being able to comply. The visit of a Victorian team was desired to further the interests of the game in Tasmania. Captain Fearon, the President of the Williamstown club, has generously offered to take the Williamstown A team (Which has the bye on 6 August) to Tasmania at his own expense. The team will leave Melbourne on the 3 August and will play a game against Launceston on 6 August, returning to Melbourne on the following Monday. The Victorian association is prepared to receive nominations for the Tasmanian visit from players who are willing to go at their own expense".

On 23 July, "Iroquois" continued: "At the monthly meeting of the Victorian Lacrosse Association, Capt. Fearon's offer to take a team of Williamstown A section players to Tasmania was considered, and official recognition of the team as representative of this state was granted to the team, which will be under the management of Mr. A. Deacon" (Another Williamstown stalwart).

The report of 13 August "Iroquois" concluded the saga with "In an endeavour to give encouragement to lacrosse in Launceston, Williamstown played them on Saturday, and treated the crowd to a good exhibition of the game. The Tasmanians showed fair form, considering their lack of match practice but Williamstown won by 13 goals to 6".

This revival was confined to the north of Tasmania and centred on Launceston: but an encouraging report appeared in "The Australasian" report on lacrosse on 20 August, under the sub-heading of Hobart Notes, where it stated "An effort is being made to revive lacrosse in Hobart. Captain J.H. Fearon of Melbourne, has been interesting himself in the matter, and he has called a meeting for this week. It is hoped to form two or three teams. Before the war lacrosse was fairly popular in Hobart". Captain Fearon went on to lead another tour to Tasmania by ship as was the way in those times.

In July 1935 Captain Fearon, as president of the V.A.L.A., led the inaugural Victorian senior team visit to Perth to play W.A. (Other than a carnival), where he celebrated his

72nd birthday, where two matches were played between the two rivals. We cannot be sure that Captain Fearon actually "Skippered" the boat from Victoria to Perth and back, but no doubt he would have been instrumental in organizing the inaugural "one on one" state game against W.A. What we also know is that on the way home the team stopped off in Adelaide and played the S.A. team. While we don't have any evidence to support it but being the man he was no doubt Captain Fearon initiated the inaugural trip and also suggested the stopover in Adelaide on the way home. In those days ship was really the only option available to get from Melbourne to Perth.

Captain Fearon was awarded life membership of the Victorian Amateur Lacrosse Association in 1936.

In the minutes of the Executive Committee of the VALA of 11 April 1940, we observe that 33 teams were entered in Sections A, B, C, and D. A new terminology occurs in the minutes in that six teams were entered in the north zone, and eight in a south zone. All this suggests a considerable reduction in the number of players available due to the war. The circumstance is further emphasised by the receipt of a letter from that loyal patron of lacrosse, Captain Fearon, that teams should be reduced to ten players. At the Executive Committee meeting fixtures were discussed, and the decision was made that the fixtures should be adhered to as long as possible.

Not only was there difficulty in finding players, but the circumstances of war also reduced the number of effective administrators. At the Executive Committee meeting held on 15 July 1940 it was resolved that all officers of the association of military or government work be exempted from automatic disqualification through non-attendance at association meetings.

With the limited publicity given to lacrosse at this time it is difficult to provide statistical evidence as to its welfare. However, there is enough information to make it clear that the game was being played in all states of the Commonwealth. The schism in New South Wales seemed to have been controlled. Circa 1934 a Victorian team visited that state, accompanied by the President of the Victorian Lacrosse Association, Captain Fearon. The Victorians were surprised by the vigour and skill of the New South Wales players, and won the first of the two games by the narrow margin of 9 goals to 7. The second game was better from the Victorian point of view but still close enough to show that the New South Wales players could play effective lacrosse. Victoria won the game by 13 goals to 7. Captain Fearon presented a cup for the best player of the series. This distinction was awarded to R. Turnbull of New South Wales.

As former player Peter Hogg recounted "I was too young to know Capt Fearon but Mal Taylor, Berry Newgreen, Lionel Burgoyne and many other oldies always talked about how Captain Fearon sponsored trips, paid for social occasions and importantly saw that a Council by-law was enacted which stated that as long as Williamstown fielded a senior team the club could not be kicked off the Fearon Reserve. The "Skipper" was also known to pay fines for individuals who got into difficulty and couldn't pay."

As an example, at Malvern in 1934 Williamstown's George Dever, who at the time was a trainer for an Australian boxing champ, punched a spectator, and was subject to a police arrest until Arch Fowler promised him his broken dentures would be replaced. Captain Fearon paid for the dental work!

According to Arch Fowler, after committee meetings senior members were invited to Captain Fearon's home for supper, beer and occasionally champagne.

The following is an article from the Williamstown Chronicle, 12 October 1929
ANOTHER OF OUR BEST CITIZENS (By "Proxy")

An eminent divine, asked once to interpret "What is a gentleman"? replied, "One who never gives offence!" It is believed there is no reliable record available as to what number of such rarities this city possesses, but at least there is one unassuming personality in our district who is freely recognised as being fully entitled to such a claim, and that citizen is the subject of this contribution, whose photo appears above. CAPTAIN JIMMY FEARON, as he is familiarly known in sporting, social and seafaring life. Those interested in any form of clean sport in this district will readily acquiesce in our statement that the Captain has done his full share consistently and uninterruptedly for a whole lifetime to foster all departments of healthy outdoor games and, incidentally, to offer every encouragement to the boys, youths and young men of his and other districts to engage in every beneficial form of athletics. His record of association with the sporting life of Williamstown is really unique. A visit to his comfortably-equipped den, "The Anchorage," in Thompson Street, reveals remarkable evidence of the part he has played for half a century in this direction. The walls of his bachelor diggings are literally covered with presentations of photos, groups and trophies from sporting institutions, which in no unmistakable manner voice the high esteem in which the Captain is regarded by a large section of the community. A native of this city, and having already passed the sixty-fifth milestone on the journey of this terrestrial sphere, it is no exaggeration to state that, for his years at least, there is no fitter or more active citizen in our midst. Notwithstanding he has never known the taste of alcohol and has been a non-smoker all his life, the Captain attributes his "good nick" and "fit and well" condition to the fact that he has not missed on one occasion for a period of thirty-eight years his morning exercises and physical jerks. In a brief conversation, one elicits the fact that the Captain's favourite sport is lacrosse, though he does not commit himself so. What he has done for this game few people have the remotest idea. In 1897, a coterie of young men held a meeting in the Baptist Church Hall, in Cecil Street, Williamstown and here it was that lacrosse had its birth in Williamstown. Mr. "Tommy" Henderson was the first president, and the late Mr Henry Hick was elected the second year. Captain Fearon was elected for the succeeding term, and remains president continuously for a period of twenty eight years. There are seven lacrosse teams in Williamstown, six of which finished in the finals this season. About 120 young athletes locally are closely associated with the game, and their president is very proud of them; to use his own vocabulary, "They are a splendid type of athlete, and first-class exponents of the sport." Established by the Captain also are the "Wanderers," two teams of boys 15 years and under. There are fifty boys in all, and he pays a special tribute to Mr. Geo. Bowman, who has charge of these juniors. He is unstinted in his praise of the enthusiasm and self-sacrificing work of, as he puts it, "My friend, Geo. Bowman." A graceful reference he makes also to the well-known Hick family. Since the introduction of lacrosse to Williamstown, there has always been at least one of the Hick's associated with the sport, and it is alleged that no one ever did more for the game than the late Bert Hick of happy memory, to which the Captain subscribes.

A feat worth recording is that, in this season alone, Captain Fearon has umpired in forty-two lacrosse matches - not a bad effort for 65 years. He has accompanied every lacrosse team which has left Victoria to engage in all Interstate competitions, one of which was just recently undertaken to Western Australia. In 1910, under the

Captain's guidance, the local boys visited N.E. Victoria, and played an exhibition game at Nagambie. The trip was a huge success, and Nagambie formed a club right away, and made our genial "Jimmy" its first president. In his home today may be seen a fine token of esteem from the Goulburn Valley organisation. So rapidly did the Nagambie club improve, that shortly afterwards their president invited them to Williamstown to try conclusions locally. The Captain personally met the visitors at Spencer Street on arrival, and escorted them to Williamstown, via Port Melbourne. The irony of the whole thing is that the country team accounted for one of the best teams the locals could put in the field. At a convivial gathering later on in the day, one of the visiting team jokingly suggested that "it was not quite the act of a good sport like the Captain to bring the "Hayseeds" across in the bay ferry on an exceptionally rough winter's morning, in order to get the team sea-sick and overwhelm them in the lacrosse arena afterwards, an event which the local team failed to accomplish.

"Jimmy" Fearon is senior vice-president of the Victorian Lacrosse Association, chairman of the Williamstown Football Club, a delegate to the Victorian Football Association, vice-president of the Victorian Football Association, vice-president of the Victorian Junior Football Association, commodore of the Williamstown Punt Club. In 1911 Williamstown through the instrumentality of "our subject," engaged South Yarra in an exhibition game at Geelong, with a view to establishing lacrosse at the "Pivot". Williamstown were successful, and a prominent Geelong business man presented the Captain with a handsome memento of the occasion, which also adorns his library and music room.

The Captain's association with cricket dates back to 1895, when he was the president of the Orientals, who won the premiership. A handsome marble clock, given to him by the club, is further evidence of his high respect. For 19 years the old Myrtle C.C. was under our friend's presidency. They were remarkably successful as juniors, winning in consecutive seasons the first, the second, and the third grade competitions in which they were engaged, a feat which was not accomplished before, or since, by any junior combination in Victoria. The Myrtles afterwards became the Williamstown District Cricket Club in the Victorian Junior Association, and "Jimmy" is still at the helm and with the boys. Amongst innumerable tokens of respect in his possession is one from the Alberton Cricket Club (S.A.), which is highly prized by its owner. The appreciation by this Adelaide team of his association with them is fully demonstrated in the club's handsome gift now at his home.

Football, of course, has been another avenue of sport that has attracted his attention, but probably not so much as lacrosse. In fact, for part of one season only, he played in the centre with the old Battery Football Club. He was always in the centre, no matter where he appeared, but, as he thought, having been unfairly attacked from the rear, in a match, "Jimmy" retaliated, and struck his opponent on the "Supramaxillary" (Jaw). He was afterwards ordered to stand down by the authorities, and that was the end of his football days. He decided right away that football could not be indulged in by one whose lofty aspirations were those of one who was destined one day to be regarded by his fellow-sports as "a gentleman." In 1916, 1917 and 1919, the Williamstown Junior Football Club won the premiership, and were runner-up in 1918. These performances annexed the handsome competition shield presented by Mr. John Wren to the Victorian Junior Association, and as the Captain was the president of the juniors during their activities, the shield found its way to "Jimmy" Fearon's possession, and is now "on deck" with quite a large number of other mementoes to keep it company. So much for his sporting life!

The Captain is an extensive reader, and is passionately fond of music, he is not an instrumentalist in music, but is in possession of all the best mechanical musical contrivances money can acquire. Always attracted to the ballroom, he still has a go at the terpsichorean art. He says it "helps him to keep fit." He recalls many happy evenings at the popular dances that eventuated in the old skating rink, where he was always a familiar figure - well groomed and laundered, wavy haired, dainty nosegay (A posy or bouquet of flowers!), and last, but not least, the proverbial scarlet merino half-hose (Socks). "Jimmy" had few rivals in the old rink. The best partners were his, but only for the dancing season. For some reason not yet divulged, none of his admirers of the fair sex (and they were many), were ever able to "rope" him in, and, unlike our friend Benedick in "Much Ado About Nothing," James elected to lead the simple life of a bachelor. It is hard to imagine such a generous and unselfish person being lost to married life, as, beyond all doubt, he would have proved himself as the ideal husband.

To the general public the Captain is known better as a harbour and river pilot, from which service he retired in July 1928, after 27 years. At that time, that ultra conservative body, the Overseas Shipping Representatives' Association were, contrary to usual custom, pleased to refer to his work as a pilot. A flattering memo, bearing the date 17 August 1929, from that body is before me. Another further testimony of his personality is from the Marine Board, who, at this period, were pleased to refer in writing to "your excellent record as a harbour pilot in the Port of Melbourne and your cordial relations at all times with the board." During his 28 years in the pilot service, the Captain handled 7950 ships of all shapes and sizes from all parts of the globe, and an extract from the "Herald" (18/7/28) states that "shipping representatives described him as the man who had taken thousands of ships in and out without costing the companies even the price of a small tin of paint." Captain Fearon has much affection for the masters of the tug boats of this port, and he attributes his success as a pilot to their great skill in performing, at times, almost impossible feats of navigation. He says he was often told by masters of ships from all nations that our tug-masters were the best in the world. Captain Fearon also pays a fine tribute to the deep sea pilots in Port Phillip. It is the only service in the world that is continually outside, and ever ready for its work, and is composed of masters who have no superior in any other part of the globe. And now, in conclusion, we pass on unreservedly to you, "Captain Jimmy," our heartiest and most cordial greetings on your successful journey of life. We do not know that you have even the mildest enemy, not even the footballer you struck on the "Supramaxillary." May the spirit of affection, health and happiness ever attend you.

FEARON. — On August 7 (suddenly), at his residence, 108 Thompson street, Williamstown, Captain James Henry Fearon, late Port Phillip Harbour pilot, beloved brother of Kate (Mrs. C. J. Dowsing, of Burnley), aged 81 years. — Rest in peace. (Remains at E. W. Jackson's chapel, North Williamstown.)

WELL KNOWN PILOT PASSES

Dies Alone at Home.

Captain James Henry Fearon, formerly a river pilot and an outstanding patron of sports, was found dead at his residence 106 Thompson-st., on Wednesday. Dr. Gurry, who was called, said that death had taken place about 24 hours previously. Captain Fearon was a bachelor and lived alone.

He was president of the Williamstown Lacrosse Club for 40 years, and during that time financed trips to Tasmania and South Australia of local teams. Cr. Alan Deacon managed two of the Tasmanian tours. The Fearon Reserve, named in his honor, will remind future generations of his labors on behalf of the youth of the district.

Captain Fearon was born July 19, 1863, and became a licensed Harbor pilot February 15, 1901. He retired on July 18, 1928, was elected to the Marine Board November 10, 1932, as a representative of the pilots, and resigned August 20, 1943.

The funeral will take place today at 3 p.m., starting from Mr. E. W. Jackson's funeral parlor, Ferguson-st. Padre Oliver, of the Seamen's Mission, will conduct a service at 2.30 p.m. at Mr. Jackson's chapel and afterwards at the Spring Vale crematorium. Port Phillip pilots will scatter the ashes over the wide expanse of Hobson's Bay.