Fearsides was born in Horbury, Yorkshire, on 10 November 1879, and educated at Wheelwright Grammar School, Dewsbury, from where, on a West Riding scholarship, he proceeded to Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he was subsequently awarded a College scholarship and where he gained first class honours in both parts of the natural sciences tripos in 1900 and 1901. He was elected a Fellow of the College (1904-15) and appointed College and Taylor Lecturer in Natural Science (1908-13), and University Demonstrator in Petrology (1909-13). During his time at Sheffield, where he developed an interest in economic geology as a means of assisting local industry, he served, amongst other achievements, as a member of the Council of the Royal Society (1936-7), member of the Council of the British Association (1935-45), Consultant Geologist to the West Midlands Division of the National Coal Board (1947-58), and member of the Council of the Geological Society of London at various times between 1913 and 1947, becoming its Vice-President (1938-40, 1945-7) and President (1943-45). Awards included the Murchison Medal of the Geological Society (1932), Council’s Gold Medal of the Surveyor’s Institution (1914), Greenwell Medal of the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers (1917) and Bessemer Premium of the Society of Engineers (1917). He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society (1932) and served on its Council (1936-7). He died in Sheffield on 15 May 1968.

The early history of geological science is of considerable interest, and was inevitably controversial, as much of the evidence revealed in rock formations appeared to contradict the history of the earth’s creation as recorded in the Bible. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was remarkably the first to recognise the true nature of fossils, confirmed by later observers such as Robert Hooke (1635-1703), as the remains of plants and animals embedded in rocks, but the nature of the rocks themselves was not to be elucidated for some 400 years after Leonardo, and in the pre-Darwinian era it was inevitable that scientists should seek to interpret evidence in the light of the story of the Flood. Nevertheless significant advances in understanding were made in the 18th century: in Germany both Johann Gottlieb Lehmann (d.1767) and Christopher Fuchsel (d. 1773) independently interpreted the striking rock formations of Thuringia as records of events occurring at different stages in the history of the earth. In France Nicolas Demarest (1725-1815) correctly deduced that columnar basalt was volcanic in origin, whilst James Hutton (1726-97) of Edinburgh, regarded as the founder of modern
geology, established the correct method for the reading of earth-history as the interpretation of phenomena rather than speculation, recognising that geological formations were evidence of ‘a succession of former worlds’. A condensed version of his theories appeared in 1788 in the first volume of the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, later published in full in his two volume work The Theory of the Earth in 1795. Another name which should be mentioned is that of William Smith (1769-1839), ‘The Founder of English Geology’. Further work in interpretation was done by scientists such as Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) and others during the earlier 19th century, and by the middle of the century three great classes of rocks, formed by different processes, had been established, the sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic, and scientific geology became firmly established.

The collection which bears Fearnside’s name comprises books of historical interest of the 19th and 20th centuries, primarily but not exclusively relating to the British Isles, assembled by himself, with some later additions. It was formerly housed in a large glass-fronted locked book-case in the Department of Geology, and when in 2001 the Department ceased to exist as a separate entity and was absorbed into the Department of Geography arrangements were made to transfer the collection to the University Library as a permanent memorial to its distinguished creator. The earliest title is a volume on fossils by James Parkinson: Organic remains of a former world (London, 1808), and other early volumes include George Young: A Geological survey of the Yorkshire Coast: describing the strata and fossils occurring between the Humber and Tees, from the German Ocean to the Plain of York (Whitby, 1822), and John Phillips: Illustrations of the geology of Yorkshire (York, 1829) with hand-coloured plates. Later publications include some of the works of Sir Charles Lyell, and, from the 20th century, a set of Wartime Pamphlets produced by the Geological Survey of Great Britain during World War II on water supply from underground sources at various locations in the UK, one of the many practical subjects in which Fearnsides took an interest during the course of his work.

[Notes based on: A.W. Chapman. The Story of a Modern University (University of Sheffield / OUP, 1955); Who’s Who; Dictionary of National Biography; H.H. Read. Geology: an introduction to earth-history (OUP, 1949)]

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FEARNSIDES COLLECTION

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Aeolus

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Anderson, J. G. C. (John Graham Comrie)

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Bailey, Sir Edward, 1881-1965

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Baily, William Hellier
Figures of characteristic British fossils : (Palaeozoic division) with descriptive remarks ; by William Hellier Baily.... London : John Van Voorst, 1875. lxxx, 126 p, 42 leaves of plates : ill. ; 22 cm.

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Balfour-Browne, Frank

Fearnsides PAM Q 61
Barrett, B. Hilton

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The advanced atlas of physical and political geography : a new series of maps specially designed for schools, colleges and private students. London : Oxford University Press, 1917. 96, 31p ; 38cm.
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A guide to Leicester and district : prepared for the British Association for the Advancement of Science 1907 meeting ; under the direction of the Publications Sub-committee. Leicester : Shardlow, [c1907]. 420 p : illus.

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  The structure & development of the mosses & ferns (Archegoniatae) ; by Douglas Houghton Campbell .... London; New York : Macmillan and Co, 1895. viii, 544 p : ill ; 24cm.

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  The natural history of the Toronto region, Ontario, Canada ; ed. by J.H. Faull ... Toronto : Pub. by the Canadian Institute, 1913. 419 p : front., plates, maps (part fold., 3 in pocket) ; 20 cm. - "This work has been prepared ... for the members of the twelfth Geological congress. Includes "Toronto, an historical and descriptive sketch, by David Reid Keys" and "The Indians who formerly inhabited or visited the site of Toronto, by Alexander Francis Chamberlain.".

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Life of Sir Roderick I. Murchison : based on his journals and letters with notices of his scientific contemporaries and a sketch of the rise and growth of palaeozoic geology in Britain ; by Archibald Geikie. Vol.1. London : Murray, 1875. (Landmarks of science). Spine title reads "Memoir of Sir Roderick Murchison".

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Investigation of the phosphatic chalk of Taplow, Bucks; by H.L. Hawkins. London: Ministry of Supply, 1948. (iii), 10 p : folding map ; 33 cm.

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Holmes, Arthur

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Lindley, John, 1799-1865
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Mantell, Gideon Algernon, 1790-1852
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