As the 100 year anniversary of the Great War approaches many organisations are expanding their online collections and digitising items that relate to 1914-1918. Extensive work is being done to catalogue and describe these collections in ways that allow items to be linked across collections and institutions using web technologies. Wollongong Library is joining these organisations and will be collecting and recording the stories for a website Illawarra Remembers 1914-1918 which is planned to be launched in September 2014.

The Library applied to the State Government (State Library of NSW) for a grant and was notified of success early in 2013. The project partners are the Illawarra Family History Group, Shellharbour Library, Kiama Library and the University of Wollongong.

The project involves asking the community to share their stories, photographs, diaries, letters etc of their family members who participated in WWI. The project plan set aside three days in 2013 to share these stories and scan memorabilia from family collections. Research identified over 3,000 names of men and women from the Illawarra who participated in WWI.

A contractor is scanning the photographs, letters, postcards, diaries etc and Wollongong Libraries’ librarian Steph Daly will photograph the memorabilia such as medals, ribbons, lockets and other objects in family collections. Wollongong Library had the first of these scan and share days at Thirroul on 26 June and the second at Dapto Library on 29 August. Shellharbour and Kiama Libraries had their scanning day on 10 September. The last Scan and Share day is planned for Saturday 26 October and to date, Wollongong library has photographed and scanned over 600 items and collected many stories.
Kim Phillips the ANZAC historian and editor of the Spirits of Gallipoli will be a guest speaker at Wollongong Library on 14 October 2013.

To read some of the stories visit the Illawarra Remembers Blog

REPORT ON OCTOBER 2013 MEETING

Speaker: Helen Laidlaw
Topic: "The Gardener's Gamble" - The Dawson Family

Our October speaker, Helen Laidlaw, presented a very enjoyable and informative talk on the history of the Dawson family. Helen’s great, great, great grandfather, John Dawson, a Lincolnshire gardener, at the age of forty seven arrived in Australia with his wife Mary and eight children on the Canton in 1835. In her talk Helen referred to the history of the family and their experiences as they settled into the colony and established themselves despite some early hardships.

Helen’s talk was accompanied by numerous images, stories and notes supported by a considerable amount of research which is documented in her book The Gardener’s Gamble published in 2010. Her research for the book was carried out over a period of twenty years resulting in a detailed and comprehensive publication drawing on a wide variety of family papers, diaries, journals, letters and many other sources.

Of particular interest are the connections the Dawson family have with Australia’s colonial history. In her presentation Helen outlined how the Dawson family, over many years, were associated and linked with a broad cross section of pioneer families across a number of locations including Sydney, Camden, Kiama and Jervis Bay. They were active in commercial trade and in a wide variety of professions such as farming, legal, medical and engineering and were involved in setting up such important institutions and activities as schools, hospitals and agricultural shows.