

## 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.

The Dawson family is linked with the history of immigration and settlement in NSW over several generations. As Helen appropriately pointed out in her very interesting talk, this family history is really “A Social History of Australia through the Dawson family”. *TB*

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