



William Dawson was already a qualified brewer when he arrived in Dunedin aged 21. The fourth son of William Dawson and Anne, nee Davie, he had completed a brewing apprenticeship with his father by 1872, and worked at Burton-on-Trent and Edinburgh, before sailing for Port Chalmers on the *James Nichol Fleming* in 1873.

He was a tall strapping fellow with blue eyes and dark, bushy beard, and left Scotland with 100 pounds and a gold watch. By the time he reached Dunedin he had spent the money and had to pawn the watch, but soon found work with Wilsons Well Park Brewery. In 1876 he was one of the three employees who left to form James Speight & Co.

In 1877 he married Mary Ann Andrews a boot-maker's daughter, the couple eventually having four daughters and two sons. In 1879 William's parents joined them and his father began working under him at Speights. The two of them produced a brew that won first prize at the 1888-89 Melbourne International Exhibition.

In 1855 Dawson was elected to the Dunedin City Council, and in 1877 became Mayor. In 1890 he was elected to Parliament for Dunedin Suburbs. Although he pursued various liberal-labour issues, his main concern was to oppose prohibition. His seat was abolished in 1893, but he continued in public life as a JP, city councillor, member of the Otago

Harbour Board, and Dunedin Hospital Board Trustees. In 1894 and 1901 he again stood for the mayoralty but was unsuccessful – in spite of the inducement to electors of free beer supplied at the brewery!

A wealthy man by now, he sent his children to the best schools, and in 1895 began spending several months overseas every second year, partly for business and health reasons, but mainly for pleasure. An ardent patriot, he was thrilled to be invited to the Lord Mayors Banquet in London in 1897 during Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations.

His Duncan Street home 'May Villa' was a palatial edifice, crammed with treasures from all parts of the world. Even his pets were exotic, one being a chimpanzee. His taste for beautiful and expensive articles led to the establishment of his jewellery business, Dawson's Ltd, in 1908. By this time Dawson's wife had been banished from the house – their children referred to her as 'the other parent' – but Dawson had a number of mistresses, his favourite being Miss De Carle.

He was a prominent member and twice president of the Caledonian Society; president of the Kaikorai Band; a founder of the Otago Bowling Club whose green was established on his own property; and also president of the national bowling society. His philanthropic interests included big contributions to the Otago Medical School, and St. Paul's Cathedral building funds. He also supported the Patients' and Prisoners' Aid Society, especially their rest home at Warrington, where he had a large holiday house and regularly hosted Speight's picnics.

As the last surviving founder of Speight's, he became chairman of directors in 1917, and in 1923 from his sick-bed chaired the historic meeting at which Speight's decided to join New Zealand Breweries. William Dawson died two months later, on 27 July 1923 and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery along with his mother and father. Interestingly enough his estranged wife, Mary Ann, died four months before him and is also buried in the family grave. On the death record she is recorded as 'widow'. His grandchildren remember him as a lovable if tyrannical old man who smelt of whisky and tobacco. After his stately residence was demolished, its gates became the entrance gates to the Botanic Gardens.