DAPTO SCHOOL CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS:

From 8th to 14th August, Dapto Public School will be celebrating its centenary. The programme includes:

- Sunday, 8th (2 p.m.): Combined Churches Service at school.
- Thursday, 12th: Special night at Dapto Dogs.
- Saturday, 14th (12 noon): Displays of old photographs and historical items. Light lunch available.
  - (1.30 p.m.): Procession, pageant, choral items, speeches and presentations. Afternoon tea available.

Former staff, students and residents are invited.

The Secretary of the Organising Committee is Mrs. L. Steele, 20 Bong Bong Street, Dapto (61-2034).

A PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR DAPTO:

The Dapto district was well provided with schools in the early 1870's. Inspector Huffer's report in 1872 mentions public schools at Avondale, with 29 pupils, and Marshall Mount with 42. (At the latter, he said, "the discipline is satisfactory except as regards the attendance of pupils during the harvest time," so evidently something was still being grown there on a big enough scale to disrupt the education system). Both Avondale and Marshall Mount had begun as "National Schools," Marshall Mount in 1859, Avondale at some date before 1861, when at a public meeting, making an evidently successful protest against a proposed change of name to Benares, it was stated that there had been a "non-vested" National School for some years on the Avondale estate, and that "Avondale, as the name of a locality, is well known through all the district."

In Dapto itself, according to Mr. Huffer, there were three "certified schools"—Church of England, Roman Catholic, and Presbyterian. He made it pretty clear that in his opinion one school, "well placed," would be enough.

Nevertheless, at least two of these schools were outside the town of Dapto. The R.C. church in those days adjoined the old cemetery in West Dapto Road. The convent and school were nearby, just on the Kembla Grange side of Dapto Creek. On the parish map a block on the south side of Sheaffe's Road near its eastern end is marked "Episcopalian School." (The Church of England had been infiltrated—the master was Mr. Alexander Campbell, who may have been responsible for the description, the Episcopalian Church perhaps being in his eyes a nonconformist body of which the Church of England was a subsidiary).

The Presbyterian school seems to be forgotten in Dapto—some old hands were prepared to swear it had never existed—but the contemporary evidence for it is irrefutable. Such information as is available suggests that it was on the main road near Cleveland Road: It was the only one of the three Dapto schools on which Mr. Huffer reported in detail—a "5½ out of 10 - could do better" sort of report ending, "The proficiency ranges from tolerable to fair."

Whether as a result of Mr. Huffer's strictures or not, a branch of the Public School League was formed, and by November 1874 was agitating vigorously for a public school in Dapto.

The Presbyterian School's certificate was withdrawn, as from 31 De-
December 1874, “on account of want of attendance.” There may have been some collusion; at a meeting of the Public School League the previous month the Rev. J. A. Stuart had referred to another school where the Presbyterians had “done their utmost to get it converted into a Public School, for which purpose they had, as a last desperate resort, taken their children away from it.”

If the “want of attendance” was a put-up job, it was not immediately successful. The early months of 1875 were filled with meeting, petitions and agitation. The trustees of the Presbyterian School offered to hand it over for conversion into a Public School; the Council of Education declined. John Brown offered a site at Brownsville; Patrick Hill Osborne offered one “on the south side of the main road, about midway between the Church of England parsonage and the Post Office” (then near Cleveland Road). After many contradictory resolutions, amendments and rescissions, a public meeting on 28th May resolved “that the matter of deciding a site . . . be left in the hands of the Council of Education.” The Council’s choice was the site offered by Osborne (now the site of the Technical College), but it was nearly two years before the school went up. In the meantime, classes were conducted in the Presbyterian school hall under Joseph Bayliss; but the Education Department’s records do not show the actual date when the classes commenced.

On 24 September 1875 the “Mercury” announced the appointment of a local School Board. The members were K. Mackenzie, R. J. Marshall, C. Heininger, John Bovard, Duncan Macrae and Evan R. Evans. Four weeks later the Board inserted an advertisement calling for tenders for the building. According to the “Mercury” the plan was for a “very neat and commodious” school house, designed to accommodate 54 pupils, and teacher’s residence.

Finally the new school building was opened on 2 April 1877. It had cost $1,492. The inspection report for that year stated:

“The buildings are of brick, recently erected and well furnished. The school grounds have been planted with ornamental trees. All the subjects presented by the Council are taught. The schoolroom is clean and well ventilated, and the general discipline is fairly satisfactory in most respects.”

Ultimately the “Episcopalian” school folded up, but Mr. Campbell and most of his pupils moved along the road to the new West Dapto Public School which opened in 1882. The R.C. school carried on as before. So, after all Mr. Huffer’s huffing and puffing, there were still three schools where he had thought three were two too many.

(An extract from a forthcoming Society publication, “Nineteenth-Century Dapto”).

PERSONAL:

Members of the Society heard with great regret of the misfortune which befell Mr. and Mrs. Ken Thomas, whose home was severely damaged by fire on 21st July. Our sympathy and best wishes go to them both.

BULLI FAMILY HOTEL:

Mr. Les Johnson, M.H.R., reports that the Bulli Family Hotel has been recommended by the National Trust Historic Buildings Committee for classification.