

REPORT ON FEBRUARY MEETING, 1998

The Dapto Smelter

At our February meeting Dr Glenn Mitchell's dynamic address on the Old Dapto Smelting Works was very well received by our members and visitors who totalled more than 30, our highest attendance for some time.

Dr Mitchell used as his starting point the Society's 1950 booklet by Bro O'Malley. Without questioning the facts presented in the book, Dr Mitchell posed some of the questions which arise from a study of these facts, such as "why did the harbour proposal and the smelter finally fail?"

The Illawarra Harbour and Land Corporation and its offshoot The Smelting Company of Australia Limited were intertwined, the long-term success of the smelter depending on development of the port. The Corporation, despite the backing of large sums of British capital, failed miserably in its intention to dredge a channel through Lake Illawarra to a deepwater port at Kanahooka Point, originally planned for the export of coal. As time went on, with very little work being done on constructing the port, the owners of South Coast coal mines became alarmed, not only at the procrastination by the company, but also by the prospect of being dependent on a private company controlling the export of coal. Eventually the Government began the construction of a port at Port Kembla, part of its reason being to provide an industrial area remote from Sydney, but doubtless with support from the coal owners. Dr Mitchell gave interesting insights into the political climate of the day, mentioning the presence of people later famous in politics, such as Edmund Barton who was at the same time a director of the Corporation

and NSW Attorney General, later to become Australia's first Prime Minister; and Herbert Hoover, mining engineer for BHP who worked on the Dapto Smelter and later became President of the United States. Mines from Mount Morgan and Broken Hill had interests in the smelter.

Reference was also made to the pollution caused by smelters, a continuing problem to the present day. Mention of the latest proposals for the Southern Copper site at Port Kembla formed one of the ingredients of a lively discussion which followed.