April Meeting—Charles Throsby Smith:

Our speaker, Mr. Edgar Beale, has submitted the following biographical note on his subject, the life of one of Wollongong's foremost pioneers:

Charles Throsby Smith was born in Cambridge, England, on 1 March 1798. His father, one of the "old Norfolk Smiths," died when he was two. His mother was a member of an old Leicester family, named Throsby, and, although an old Aunt Lucy Smith helped greatly in the upbringing of the orphaned boy, it was the Throsby family which, to some degree unwittingly, shaped the course of his life.

His schooling in and around London, aided by his beloved Aunt Lucy, ended when he was sixteen, whereupon he had an experimental voyage to assess the sea as a means of livelihood. In 1814 the ship "Claudine" sailed to the West Indies and, press-gangs, storms and the American War notwithstanding, he decided on the sea as a career, intending to join his older brother, then engaged in the East India trade with his own vessel based at Calcutta. Joining the convict ship "Guildford," he reached Sydney in early April 1816.

There he stayed at Glenfield, near Liverpool, for about three months with his mother's brother, Dr. Charles Throsby. During that time he visited his uncle's newly-opened cattle-grazing station at the Five Islands. Yet the sea called again, and for about twenty months he sailed the southern Pacific on a rather unsuccessful but adventurous trading voyage in the brig "Daphne," which took him nearly as far as the coast of Chile, and north to the Marquesas. Returning about March 1818, he again spent some three months with Uncle Charles, and in July of that year he resumed his delayed voyage to Calcutta.Arriving there, he learnt of his brother's recent death. All he could now do was assist in the winding up of his brother's affairs, and return to Sydney. That was in November 1819. Then he found that his childless Uncle Charles, wanting an heir, had brought out another nephew, also named Charles Throsby.

Meanwhile, Dr. Throsby had done much valuable exploration, and had somehow formed a theory that south of Lake George there was a large, navigable, salt-water river flowing to the east coast. Since this would have been of great importance in opening up the nearer hinterland, by authority of Governor Macquarie Dr. Throsby sent young Smith, with the elusive Joe Wild and another man named Vaughan, to trace this river downwards to the sea. It took only a few weeks of December 1819 for the party, the first colonists to cross the Limestone Plains (where Canberra now stands), to see that the river flowed westwards, not east; it was, of course, the upper reaches of the Murrumbidgee. Floods and simple geographical fact caused their retreat. But Dr. Throsby was furious; he had been far too positive and vocal in his assertions, and had made rather a fool of himself. The resultant quarrel determined young Smith to leave his kindly but over-possessive and irascible uncle, renouncing the good chance he had had of being at least one of the old man's heirs, and leaving Cousin Charles in confident expectancy. For Smith's part, he would now make his own way independently in life.

With his uncle's help he had obtained from the Governor a "passport" to remain in the colony as a settler, and a promise of a land grant.
This, consisting of 300 acres, he located near his uncle's then abandoned stockman's hut at what is now Wollongong, attracted there by the fold in the coastline which now contains the harbour, and which then was the best offering for sea transport. Meanwhile he leased Upchurch farm, on Windmill Hill, between Appin and the Cataract River, building a stone house. Soon afterwards, on 22 October 1822, he married Sarah, a daughter of his neighbour William Broughton, the Deputy Commissary General.
By her he was to have five daughters and two sons.

Whilst running Upchurch Farm, Smith kept some of his assigned convicts working on his Illawarra grant, clearing, fencing and cultivating. In 1823 he left Appin and settled permanently on the coast, in a cottage, probably little better than a hut, situated near the tiny harbour (such as it was at that time). He was then 25 years of age, and the second phase of his life was beginning.

The remainder of his life was long but less eventful, though he was at the very centre of the development of a community. The personal side of his life is shortly told: He built a larger house on what became known as Smith's Hill; it was called Bustle Cottage, the name reflecting the activity at the busy establishment it became. The first house was destroyed by fire, and the second was built of stone. There his wife died: later he married a widow with one young child, and had by her four more children, two daughters and two sons. After his second marriage in 1839 he chartered a ship and took his young family to England, where the elder children attended school. Returning, he found his affairs in a mess because of the neglect of the man entrusted with them, and because of the economic depression of those years. But more hard work restored his fortunes. His second wife died in 1865, and he married a third time. He died on 25 September 1876, the patriarch of his family as well as of the town he had seen grow nearby.

Indeed, the presence of this town was the second of the sources of his success, the first being hard work. His grant of 300 acres was comprised roughly within the rectangle made by the sea coast on the east, Crown Street on the south, the present railway line on the west, and Stuart Park on the north. His hunch had been right; people had to foregather there, not only for access to the boat harbour, but to get fresh water at the small lagoon at the eastern end of what became Market Street. The area was the obvious place for a town, which was duly laid out in 1834. Bustle Farm (for the name "Bustle Hall" shown on the map was a misnomer) became subdivided by the Crown, first as far north as Smith Street, later to Campbell Street, and the remainder by Smith's trustees after his death.

The town grew, and his influence in it remained throughout his life. His barn near the harbour provided shelter for the first church services and school. In the early 'forties he was a director of a steam navigation company to provide services for the growing township, and he provided a store and a tramroad from the beach to the store. He was a trustee of the first school; he provided a cottage for the first library and reading room, and later gave land for the first School of Arts and hospital. He either gave or assisted in acquisition of land for many of the churches, and was a first trustee for his own, the Anglican Church. He was appointed a magistrate in 1844. He was a member of the first show society, which played an important part in the development of quality cattle and good agriculture in the district. For many years he held the office of Crown Land Commissioner. When the short-lived Illawarra District Council was established in 1843, he was appointed a Councillor. He presided at the dinner which celebrated the first commercial mining of coal in 1849, though he resisted an attempt to run a railway across his lands from the Keira mine to the
harbour, and the line was created only when an Act of Parliament over­
came his resistance. He was returning officer for the election of the first
municipal council in 1859, and was electoral officer for the early parlia­
ments.

Though robust in health, his decline was rapid following a cut toe
which became gangrenous. He was, I believe, sincerely remembered as a
man of energy, of genial, kindly and affable disposition, a man
who was the same to all men; remembered for his citizenship and his
jovial salutation: “Well, neighbour, how are you?” Though of rather strict
religious belief, he was liberal in his political leaning, and by his jolly
banter preserved good humour at elections when voting was by show of
hands and feelings could otherwise run high. People recalled his memory
with affection, for, although he had arrived at the status of patriarch, he
was a man whose innate dignity did not need emphasis by external trapp­
ings, who chose to be designated, in down-to-earth simplicity, as “Old
Charley Smith.”