Local patriotism is not enough. Evidence is needed too—as appears in the Mystery of the Stockman’s Hut, to which the local press has recently devoted more space than enough.

Advocates of the removal of the Stockman’s Hut Monument to Port Kembla appear, at the time of writing, to be basing their case on (a) “an ancient oil painting of a bark hut, claimed to be the hut of Mr. Throsby’s stockman”; (b) Oxley’s reference to the hut as being “near a fresh water lagoon”; (c) the statement by “long-time resident Mr. Charles Jackson,” in “an address delivered some years ago to the Wollongong (sic) Historical Society,” that the hut was “on the side of Parkes Street near Coomaditchie Lagoon.”

The painting certainly depicts a hut; but apparently it is not known when or by whom it was painted, or on what grounds it is claimed to be Throsby’s stockman’s hut. From the newspaper reproduction it would be hard to draw any conclusion about its location—except that Mr. Col Bruton was prepared to take his oath that it was not at Port Kembla, but at Thirroul.

The lagoon, it is claimed, must have been Coomaditchie, as there is no other fresh-water lagoon on this part of the coast. But Meehan’s plan, mentioned later, and Mitchell’s plan for the town of
Wollongong¹ both show a lagoon behind South Beach. Land fronting Harbour Street conveyed by Charles Throsby Smith to Joseph Harris in 1841 is described in the conveyance² as bounded on the south-east by a lagoon. Alexander Stewart says, "The soldiers when they came down dug a well on the north side of where the town lagoon, beside the Convent, now is... At the southern end of the present town lagoon Mr. Smith sank a barrel for his cattle to drink from... When I came down the town lagoon was a hollow... but it was then dry... In 1832 there was a great downpour of rain... The lagoon became so full that the water overflowed... The water in the lagoon was then good and fresh, and it served all who required drinking water for some years to come."³ The lagoon was filled in, and turned into Lang Park, as relief work during the depression of the 1930s. There must be a good many people around Wollongong who remember it. No one denies that the hut was near a lagoon; but Coomaditchie was not the only lagoon.

Mr. Jackson is an old and good friend of this Society. He is undoubtedly a long-time resident, and probably no one knows more about Port Kembla. But obviously neither he nor anyone else now living could have first-hand knowledge of where the hut was. He has kindly lent us the text of his talk, which was given to this Society as long ago as August 1951, but it seems that in it he did not cite any evidence or give any grounds for the identification of the block in Parkes Street as the site of the hut.

As for the claim made by Mr. Bruton for Thirroul, the hut in the painting may have stood by Flanagan’s Creek, as he says; but unless and until it is proved to be Throsby’s, that is immaterial to the present question.

At this point one might simply say that so far there is no case to answer. However, some points in the case for the present site might be of interest:

In 1825 Surveyor James McBrien was instructed to mark out a grant to Charles Throsby Smith of 300 acres “at Mr. Throsby’s old station on the coast.”⁴ That instruction could hardly have been given if Throsby’s station had been at Port Kembla—the whole of the Port Kembla and Berkeley areas had been granted to David Allan and Robert Jenkins in 1817. Reference to the parish map will show that Throsby Smith’s grant extended from Crown Street to Blacket Street. The natural inference is that “Mr. Throsby’s old station” was between those limits.

Charles Throsby Smith himself, in his lecture, “Reminiscences of Forty-two Years’ Residence in Illawarra,”⁵ said that Throsby’s cattle, after spending their first night in Illawarra on the point at Bulli, “were driven on to Wollongong and a stockyard was erected for them near the site of the present Roman Catholic school house, while a hut was erected for the stockmen near the corner of Smith Street.” Throsby Smith was not present at the 1816 meeting, but he was on the coast while Throsby’s stock and stockmen were still
there (he assisted in moving them to Bong Bong in 1820); he had every opportunity of knowing what he was talking about.

The late Mr. B. T. Dowd, F.R.A.H.S., formerly Research Officer in the Lands Department, located Meehan's Field Book No. 119 and Plan No. 1.163 in the State Archives. From the plan he made a tracing, from which was drawn the second plan in “The First Five Grantees,” showing part of the coastline (clearly recognisable as Brighton Beach, Flagstaff Point and part of South Beach), the “non-existent” lagoon and the hut, with the positions of Smith and Harbour Streets dotted in. Our Research Secretary recently checked the original plan and found, alongside the hut, the faint but decipherable words, “Mr. Throsby’s Hut.”

So, on the evidence so far produced, our conclusions are:

The meeting between Oxley and Meehan and the grantees took place at Throsby’s stockman’s hut.

The hut was near the corner of Smith and Harbour Streets, Wollongong.

The monument is in the right place and should stay there.

1—Original in the possession of Mr. E. Beale; printed in “Earliest Illawarra” p. 56.
3—Ib, No VI, Illawarra Mercury, 1894, reprinted 18th May 1934.
5—Extracts from this lecture are printed in “Earliest Illawarra” pp. 27-28 and 44.