

# making peace with the past

# 1928 - 2008

Kaytetye man and Vietnam veteran Geoff Shaw told the story of Baxters Well in English as told by Tommy Thompson to the CLC in 2003 during research for the 75th anniversary of the Coniston Massacre.

"This place - as Tommy Thompson has said, this is everyone's big place - Kaytetye, Warlpiri, Waramungu, Anmatyerr Athimpelengkwe is a 'joint venture' country," Mr Shaw said.

"This is the place that used to join for every business.

"But the story of Baxters Well and the Coniston Massacre is not just our story - this story needs to be told to all Australians. It belongs now to Australian history and it is our job to get it told.

"When Frederick Brooks was killed in August 1928 at Yurrkuru by Bullfrog, Constable Murray came up from Alice Springs with a group of men. They started shooting any Aboriginal person they saw.

"The police went on horseback along the side of the creek, following the people's tracks. They travelled and shot people as they went along.

"They were with two police trackers who showed them where our relatives were.

"When they were on their way to Barrow Creek they came upon a big group of old Kaytetye men.

"They were from Arnke [Barrow Creek], Jarra-Jarra, Alapanpe, Ertwerrpe, Ngkwarnte, Warlekerlange, Errene, Apewempe, Arnerre, lleyarne.

"They had gathered for an ltharte ceremony. Poor things, they were unaware of what was going on.

"They were holding a green budgerigar ceremony, a ltharte atetherre ceremony here at Athimpelengkwe when they got shot.

"The police told the trackers to tell the Aboriginal people to make a big fire. 'And tell them that we're going to get some meat for them, a killer. When they make

the fire we will be able to see them dance properly in the light,' the police said.

"They made a big bonfire near the ceremony ground. They made a fire on each side of the tyayengarre [the place in the middle of the ceremony ground where the men paint up]. The poor old men got painted up with down [feathers] and everything. Then they started dancing. The police said: 'We'll watch them more when the sun comes up.'

"So the men danced in the [early] day-time. The police came around on horseback with their guns.

"Then they started shooting everyone. They circled around the ltharte camp, all the people were in the middle.

"They were killed there at Athimpelengkwe.

"Even the little children were beaten over the head with the stirrup. The police smashed the children against the trees.

"All the mothers and fathers were shot, the young girls, the young people, the old men, the old ladies and middle aged people.

"The two trackers piled the bodies up on the fire, on the high flames. They were all burnt.

"Here at Athimpelengkwe there were Kaytetye, Warlpiri, Anmatyerr and Waramungu people. The skulls of our relatives are here, the skulls of our forefathers.

"We still remember. The memory just won't go away.

"But we're not bitter. We just want everybody to know and to acknowledge this black spot in Australian history

"Our people's spirit is here and we want to tell everyone about this place where our relatives lie."



**Top: Willowra ladies dancing**  
**Above: Ned Kelly, who was another key force in having the memorial erected.**  
**Far left: Alekerange ladies did several dances to close the ceremony.**  
**Left: Geoffrey Shaw made an impassioned speech about the need to remember the recent history of the Coniston Massacre.**