

## FOREWORD

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*'THE CRADLE OF MY PEOPLES WORLD':  
THE NYERI NYERI GIVE THANKS TO  
BLANDOWSKI, KREFFT AND MÜTZEL*

I DEDICATE my part, in the 2007 Royal Society of Victoria's 'Blandowski's Expedition to the Murray River: European Naturalists and their Contribution to Science in Australia between 1850 and 1859' Symposium, to my spiritual father Mr Alfred Victor Darcy Pettit, who passed away on 14 August 2007. If he were here today, in the living sense, he would probably say something like 'you could live four life-

times and not see all that this region has to offer or fully understand how our people survived in this environment.' Alfred Victor Darcy Pettit was one for promoting gatherings such as this: where people from all walks of life and different expertise come together and share knowledge and stories; where people make new friends and reignite old friendships; and, where people bring together knowledge and cultural understanding with the view of making the world a more informed place and learn from the experience (Fig. 1).



*Fig. 1.* Chris Schreiber from Nyeri Nyeri and Darren Perry representing the Ngintait – both Murray River tribal groups – perform the smoking ceremony of welcome at Chaffey Landing (Mondellimin) to participants of the Royal Society of Victoria's symposium on Blandowski's expedition to the Murray River, Friday 21 September 2007 (see *Sunraysia Daily* 22 September 2007). Source: Museum Victoria. Photographer: Rebecca Carland.

Firstly I would like to give respect and acknowledge the neighbours of the Nyeri Nyeri, they being; the Ngintait, Marcat, Wergaia, Tatti Tatti, Latji Latji, Mutti Mutti, Barkinji and Nyampa Peoples, past and present.

Well, what a wonderful thing to happen, simply because, not only do I happen to be a descendant of the Nyeri Nyeri, but I am also an archaeologist and have spent much of my working life endeavouring to better understand this region in the archaeological sense. I also worked at Museum Victoria as the Curator for South-eastern Australia for a period of six years and to now find myself co-opening this symposium is truly a special moment for my people and for me.

More than one hundred and fifty years ago an expedition came to my ancestor's lands, the lands of the 'Nyeri Nyeri', and set up camp at Mondellimin (also known as Chaffey Landing) in Merbein, Northwest Victoria. Specifically they came to our lands in order to collect specimens for the Museum of Natural History (now Museum Victoria). The fruits from the Blandowski expedition now make up an important section of Museum Victoria's natural history collections.

Blandowski, Krefft, and the other workers employed by the expedition, had the wonderful opportunity to work with, observe and record the cultural heritage of my people and of adjacent Aboriginal groups. What we have learned from the Blandowski expedition is truly phenomenal and our modern data can only be enhanced by incorporating the material and data collected more than one hundred and fifty years ago into today's understandings of Aboriginal lifeways.

Before Blandowski, this region thrived in all aspects of Aboriginal lifeways relating to our world prior to colonisation. I truly believe that the Blandowski study of my people was at an important time in the greater scheme of things. Prior to the arrival of the European pastoralists and the Blandowski expedition, we were fully developed as a hunter-gatherer society with well-established boundaries between us and our neighbours, we were at the height of our ethos, we had a greater understanding of our world than ever before. The people of Northwest Victoria, Western New South Wales and South Australia have been immensely studied, they were studied and continued to be studied post Blandowski, by the likes of Charles Sturt, Sir Robert Blackwood, Ken Simpson, Dermott Casey, Annie Ross, Colin Pardoe, Mark Grist, Roger Leubbers, Harvey Johnson, Luise Hercus, Jeannette Hope, Judith Littleton and others.

We, the Nyeri Nyeri, retain stories that have been handed down to us via our oral tradition. This tradition is one way that we, the 'Nyeri Nyeri', stay connected to this land today. The information that comes from this symposium will further cement our cultural heritage whilst adding to the fabric of Victoria.

I along with many colleagues have located and studied many important archaeological sites in far Northwest Victoria. We together and individually have endeavoured to understand the archaeology in a regional context. The information now available to us through the Blandowski symposium and the publications in this volume are an invaluable contribution to that understanding.