

**‘Last Night I dreamt that I had gone to Hell’:  
Bloomsbury and the Myth of the Great War**  
**Humanities Research Centre Seminar**

Monday 5 May, 2014, 4.00 – 5.30pm

Conference Room. AD Hope #14 Australian National University

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**Professor Alastair MacLachlan, Australian National University**



In this the centenary year of what could reasonably be described as the twentieth century’s ‘original sin’ of 1914, I shall examine the reaction of some Bloomsbury writers – Lytton Strachey especially, but also E.M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, Clive Bell & Virginia Woolf – not so much to the experience of World War I (for none of them experienced the war first hand) as to what I have called ‘The Myth of the Great War’.

Using the writings of G.M. Trevelyan – a fairly typical progressive who became a liberal warrior in 1914 – as a template, I shall outline the nature of what became the prevailing myth. I shall then explore the ways in which Bloomsbury sought to puncture this myth, and to ‘make a protest’ against what one of them called ‘a whole set of vices and weaknesses which had come to be treated as virtues’: myths (as they saw them) of patriotism, honour, duty, manliness, self-sacrifice, fortitude, atonement, conformity, comradeship, chivalry, philanthropy, good sportsmanship and missionary politics (to mention a few!) Bloomsbury, of course, created its own myth – but that is another story.

*Dr. Alastair MacLachlan is a historian and an Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre, ANU. He taught for many years at Sydney University and also at Cambridge University, UNSW and Victoria University, Wellington. He has written on a range of topics from The British Civil Wars of the 17th century and Queen Anne’s England through the French Revolution and European Nationalism to the English ‘history wars’ of the 1930s and the British Marxist Historians. He is currently completing a dual biography of G.M. Trevelyan and Lytton Strachey entitled ‘The Pedestal and the Keyhole’. His most recent publication is ‘Becoming National? G.M. Trevelyan: The Dilemmas of a Liberal (Inter)nationalist 1900-1945.’ (HRC., ANU e-Press 2013)*

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*This lecture is free and all are welcome.*

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