

HOME TRUTHS



Australian Historical Association Annual Conference, 1–4 July 2024



Flinders University is proud to be hosting the annual conference of the Australian Historical Association from July 1st to 4th, 2024. The local organising committee of historians from the University's College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences is excited to welcome historians from around Australia and the world to Adelaide on Kurna Country to share their new research and to engage one another on the pressing questions facing our discipline and our communities.

Call for Papers

The search for truth and the dispelling of lies sits at the heart of popular understandings of the task of the historian. Our discipline aims to bring enriched understandings of the past that assist in confronting contemporary challenges. In a world where denial and doubt are viable political strategies, the perhaps impossible demand for the discipline to provide simple and actionable truths remains urgent and insistent. Whether at the centre of political debates or within the minutiae of grassroots community discussions, historians are seen as offering necessary complexity to the process of uncovering truth. Meanwhile, historians have their own complicated and contentious history with 'truth' and the possibility of a historically enriched way of knowing the present.

In Australia, truth telling is one of the pillars of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the generous invitation from First Nations Australians to the settler nation to build a future where Indigenous peoples have power to shape their own lives. But just what telling the truth might look like remains fraught. At the macro level, Royal Commissions, inquiries, and court cases dominate the news and foreground the search for reliable new truths that question the institutions that have dominated lives. At the same time, many Indigenous voices insist that truth telling can only be generated from the bottom up, and requires a process of respectful listening, where home truths speak to palpable and intergenerational injustices rather than from the top down as blanket truths for all.

Elsewhere, home truths continue to weaken the previously robust façades of social and cultural institutions. For many, the home remains a site of violence rather than a haven from worldly pressures. Universities are in the throes of reckoning with the bodies buried in their foundations and their ongoing abetting of structural violence. The sturdy monuments to heroic colonial lives that dot public space are called into question, and sometimes pulled down. Movements like Extinction Rebellion demand that we 'tell the truth' about who is causing the climate and biodiversity crises.

Amid all of this, historians remain reluctant to speak truths about the past in an authoritative way. Perhaps, this conference asks, instead of definitive truth, historians might turn to the telling of home truths, local truths, and contestable truths to find the epistemological ground they seek for conversations about the past and the present. Such home truths may be unpleasant and confronting. Some may be tentative, or even speculative, requiring further excavation. Understanding the complicated politics of knowledge, this conference asks, what are the home truths our discipline and our society needs to prepare us for a rapidly changing world?

To answer these questions and others, the 2024 Annual Conference of the Australian Historical Association will meet at Flinders University on Kurna Country in Adelaide. The organisers welcome proposals for papers and panels on any geographical area, time period, field of history, or theoretical or conceptual aspects of history, especially those addressing the theme of 'home truths'. The conference will also continue the tradition of hosting streams for various AHA-affiliated groups and sub-disciplinary themes.

The Conference will feature four distinguished keynotes:

- Prof. Julia Laite, Birkbeck, University of London
- Ass. Prof. Natalie Harkin, Flinders University
- Dr. Vanessa Hearman, Curtin University
- Prof. Frank Bongiorno, ANU and AHA President

Submissions will open in late 2023 and proposals are due by 23 February 2024 – further details to follow.

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