

CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE SEMINAR SERIES 2012-2013

Tuesday 12 March 2013 (Week 10)
5.00 pm – Ramphal Building Room R.014



Professor Chris Philo

**(School of Geographical and Earth Sciences,
University of Glasgow)**



***"Cats robbed him of his wealth, his health
and his reason": The wild and tranquil geographies of animals and
madness***

It is said that Louis Wain (1860-1939), a late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century British illustrator, was 'driven mad' by cats. He drew cats by the thousands, as well as having various feline encounters – as a companion and comfort, as the possible source of a serious fall – and cats featured heavily in his own understandings of philosophy, science, medicine and world affairs. He experienced various bouts of mental ill-health, leading ultimately to his commitment to lunatic asylums (public and private) in and around London. A close examination of Wain's life, art and writing opens a window on the entangled geographies of animals and madness, as well as an opportunity to deploy little-known and to an extent contradictory arguments from Michel Foucault about: (i) animals and madness (in their *wildness*) as both comprising forms of 'counter-nature'; and (ii) rehabilitating animals as potentially part of a tranquil *milieu* conducive to the soothing of (human) madness. A cue is offered here for addressing parallel trajectories in a modern 'taming' of both animals and madness, expressed in the will to push both slaughterhouses/live meat markets *and* lunatic asylums from the city into rustic seclusion, but so too is a cue for probing contemporaneous claims about the potential therapeutic value of animals for treating madness. Deploying Wain's curious story to chase diverse tracks in these thicketed meeting-grounds between animals and madness, this presentation will seek to exemplify what a spatial sensibility can add to studies in psychiatric/medical history.



Centre for the
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