

## **GCPH Seminar Series 14: lecture 2**

### **Museums and public health in Glasgow – the lessons of history**

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and Associate Professor, College of Arts,  
University of Glasgow*

**6th December 2017, 4.30pm – 6.30pm**  
**Kelvin Hall, Lecture theatre 1, 1445 Argyle Street**  
**Glasgow G3 8AW**



Museums all over the world are developing projects and programmes aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of their visitors, from dementia-friendly tours to art therapy, and from exhibitions promoting healthy living, to projects for people with mental health issues. Can museums make a difference to health and wellbeing? Even if they can, do museums have the capacity to make a real difference at a population level? This talk will explore historical and recent evidence to formulate some conclusions about the potential of museums to improve health and wellbeing.

Using Glasgow as an example, this talk will explore the connected histories of public health and public museums, as products of the Victorian era. Leading politicians of the time made an explicit link between cultural provision, and museums in particular, with public health. But were they right to do so? The second theme of this talk will be recent epidemiological evidence that cultural attendance – simply visiting a museum or art gallery – has an influence on people's health to such an extent that regular attenders live longer than infrequent visitors.

Today we face different disease challenges than those that faced the Victorians. The emergent disease conditions of the 21st century are poor mental health, loneliness, suicide, substance abuse and obesity. Against such a backdrop, what is the contemporary role of museums as part of a shared public sector contribution to human flourishing? And if museums do really make a difference to health and wellbeing, how can we maximise that contribution?

*Mark O'Neill, FMA, PhD, is former Head of Glasgow Museums and is Associate Professor in the College of Arts at the University of Glasgow. Mark was Director of Policy & Research for Glasgow Life, the charity which delivers arts, museums, libraries and sports services for the City of Glasgow, from 2009-2016. In his time with Glasgow Museums he led the teams which established the Open Museum (outreach service) and the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, refurbished Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum and created the Riverside Museum (European Museum of the Year, 2013).*

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A written summary, recording and video will be available on the GCPH website after the event.