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Remembrance: Aidan Mackey (1922-2024)

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# Aidan Mackey (1922-2024)



(From the collection of the Marion E. Wade Center [MackeyAward\_12].  
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*Aidan Mackey on the occasion of receiving the Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.*

Aidan Mackey, famed G.K. Chesterton scholar and recipient of the second Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award, passed away on 4 May 2024 at the age of 101. His dedicated work as a Chesterton expert and specialty bookseller greatly improved the quality of Chestertonian research as well as the accessibility of Chesterton's writings. As many could attest, Aidan was quick to support the research of others who were working in this area, never hesitating to do whatever he could to aid fellow scholars by generously sharing his insights and findings with them.

Aidan grew up in Manchester, England, and was introduced to Chesterton at age fourteen when his brother told him to read *The Man Who Was Thursday*. According to Aidan, he "instantly wanted to know what else [Chesterton] had written and to read more." At about the same time, financial concerns made it necessary for Aidan to drop out of school, but he continued to read as much of Chesterton's writings as he could find.

Aidan met his wife, Dorene, while working at a Catholic bookstore. After both served briefly in the Air Force, they were married in 1945 at the end of World War II. Aidan spent the next several years teaching and serving in the Foreign Office, all the while making connections with Chesterton's living friends and relatives and helping international collectors locate scarce Chesterton volumes in Great Britain. In the 1950s, he founded a monthly journal, *The Defendant* (which was eventually renamed *The Distributist*) and served as its editor for six years. Family was also a significant and important part of Aidan's life. He was a loving father to his seven daughters and, later, a devoted grandfather to his numerous grandchildren.

Aidan spent much of his career as a teacher, including as the headmaster of St. Tarcisus School in Surrey, during which time he assisted in the development of the English Middle School system. When he retired from teaching in the 1970s, he took up secondhand book-dealing. At his shop, Vintage Books, he bought and sold books by, about, and owned by G.K. Chesterton,

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along with writings by the other six Wade authors. His reasonable prices and unique items (including such artifacts as Chesterton's hat and walking stick), quickly helped Vintage Books gain popularity among readers of Chesterton and like-minded authors. Based in part upon items he discovered in his bookshop work, Aidan wrote numerous articles, lectured across Europe and North America, and published a number of books including *Collected Poetry: Part I* and *Part II* for *G.K. Chesterton: Collected Works*, and *G. K. Chesterton: A Prophet for the 21st Century*.

Aidan became a friend of the Wade Center when he first wrote to offer items from Vintage Books in December 1977. Quickly deepening his connection to the Wade, less than a year later, Aidan included a mention of Wheaton College in his storybook *Mr. Chesterton Comes to Tea*. Since that auspicious beginning, Aidan went on to serve on the Wade Center's Advisory Board for VII for almost four decades (1984-2023). Always attentive to the research needs of other scholars, he frequently sent items of interest to enhance the Wade Center's holdings. Aidan was also a welcome visitor at the Wade Center a number of times throughout the years. In turn, Wade staff members often had the privilege of spending time with Aidan and Dorene in their home in Bedford during their trips to England. On 27 September 2008, Aidan received the second [Clyde S. Kilby Lifetime Achievement Award from the Wade Center](#) in recognition of his significant contribution to Chesterton studies. He remains one of only three people to be granted this award.

Over the years, Aidan amassed an impressive personal collection of books, artwork, various original items, and memorabilia related to Chesterton. He generously permitted others to use these resources at his home in Bedford, but in 1996, out of a desire to make this collection even more accessible, he donated it to Westminster College in Oxford. The Chesterton Study Centre was housed in various locations in Oxford for the next several decades, until it finally found a permanent home at the Notre Dame London Global Gateway in central London on Trafalgar Square. Happily, Aidan was able to be present at the dedication ceremony in October 2022.

Those who had the privilege of personally knowing Aidan remember him as thoughtful, highly knowledgeable, and a wise resource in an area of scholarship that, at the time, was sparse. As a result of his many years of selfless contributions to Chesterton studies, Vintage Books became a trusted source of elusive, out-of-print Chesterton and related materials, and Aidan, himself, became an internationally respected expert. A lifelong Chesterton enthusiast and generous friend to many all over the world, Aidan Mackey, with his kind heart and incomparable sense of humor, will be greatly missed.

ELISE PETERSON  
MARJORIE LAMP MEAD