

# G. K. Chesterton and the Paradox of the City

SYMPOSIUM: UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON, 22<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2011

‘The modern city is ugly not because it is a city but because it is not enough of a city, because it is a jungle, because it is confused and anarchic, and surging with selfish and materialistic energies.’

G. K. Chesterton



G. K. Chesterton was born and educated in London and spent much of his adult life there. His fiction explores various aspects of metropolitan experience, characteristically by way of whimsy, joke, metaphor and paradox. Like Dickens, the London writer to whom Chesterton recognised he owed most, the modern city's apparently irreducible complexity would prove a rich imaginative resource for much of his literary career. In novels like *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, as well as the shorter fiction, Chesterton played with the various truisms that circulate about the modern *urbis*, employing the form of narrative to test axioms about its character to their logical extremes. Chesterton's writing about London bristles with a sense of the contradictions endemic to urban life and, perhaps as a result, it is stimulatingly difficult to pin down politically or in terms of the history of ideas. Cities inspired some of his most apposite and illuminating comments about modernity but also provoked many of his most problematic and reactionary pronouncements. This symposium, on 22 September 2011, held at University College London, where Chesterton was briefly a reluctant student, is hosted by the City Centre, UCL English Department's cross-disciplinary urban research forum. *G. K. Chesterton and the Paradox of the City* will mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the author's death by exploring the complex role of the urban in his writing.

This event is free-of-charge, and is funded by the UCL English Department. Registration now open: please contact Dr. Matthew Beaumont [m.beaumont@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.beaumont@ucl.ac.uk) or Matthew Ingleby at [matthewingleby@gmail.com](mailto:matthewingleby@gmail.com) to reserve a place.

**PROGRAMME**  
**G. K. Chesterton and the Paradox of the City**  
**(Foster Court, UCL)**

**11.30 Panel 1 – The Art of Fooling Around**

Colin Cavendish-Jones (St Andrews): ‘Hymns on the Hill: the poetry and paradox of London in the works of G.K. Chesterton’

Ellen Driver (Durham): ‘The Nonsense of Notting Hill: dissolving and resolving the city through linguistic play’

Daniel Gabelman (St Andrews): ‘Cockney Doodler Went to Town: Chesterton’s illustrations of Cities’

Michael Shallcross (Durham): ‘Puck in Pimlico: Urban Incongruity and Boundaried Play in ‘The Blue Cross’

**13:00 LUNCH (provided for speakers)**

**14.00 Panel 2 - Gaining Entry: The Property of Cities**

Lynne Hapgood (Nottingham Trent): ‘‘Lightly locked’ - but where is the key? An archaeological approach to G. K. Chesterton’s vision of the urban’

Matthew Taunton (QMUL): ‘Distributism and the City’

Matthew Ingleby (UCL): ‘Chesterton and the Romance of Burglary’

**15:30 COFFEE**

**16:00 Panel 3 - Palimpsests: Traces Beneath**

Matthew Beaumont (UCL): ‘Chesterton and Childe Roland: Questing in the City’

Merrick Burrow (Huddersfield): ‘The Club of Queer Trades: Homosociality and the City’

Nicholas Freeman (Loughborough): ‘Finding London in London: Chesterton's Invisible City’

**17:30 Plenary: William Oddie (paper title tbc)**

**18:30 Drinks Reception**