

# H-Diplo

## **A Tribute to Sally Marks**

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*[The H-Diplo Editorial Board and Editors thank Professor Keylor for writing this tribute to Sally Marks, a tireless supporter of H-Diplo and long-time member of its Board. We send our sincere condolences to Sally's family, and note with great sadness the passing of a friend as well as a fine and generous scholar. —Diane Labrosse].*

by **Alan Sharp**, University of Ulster, Emeritus

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I would like, if I may, to add a few words to Bill Keylor's eloquent tribute to Sally Marks.<sup>1</sup> I first met Sally in the Round Room of the old Public Record Office in London in the late 1960s. It was late on a Friday afternoon, I had reached the end of a run of FO 371s on Germany – I was working on Anglo-French relations after World War I – and I noticed there were a few volumes on Belgium which I thought might offer some interesting perspectives on some of the problems of treaty enforcement so I ordered them up. No-one ever spoke in the PRO so it was disconcerting to have a firm American voice asking, in tones that made it very clear that this was a question of trespass, what I was doing consulting those files. Fortunately I was able to assure her that Belgium was all hers and Sally then offered some very helpful advice on archives in Brussels which might help to fill some of the gaps at a time when the French papers were still unavailable. My trip to consult the Archives du Royaume was about as exotic as my Ph.D. research ever got – friends were heading off in Land Rovers to look at crusader castles which seemed much more fun – but the papers were very useful.

There was quite a long gap until we met again at the Berkeley conference on the Treaty of Versailles in 1994, though I was, of course, aware of her work on (what else!) Belgium and especially enjoyed her exchanges with David Felix over the perennially controversial subject of reparations. Thereafter we corresponded regularly and met intermittently on my rare visits to the U.S. As Bill wrote, Sally was a generous critic and adviser – though if she thought you were wrong, she pulled few punches. I always sent her drafts of whatever I was writing – if it was good enough for Sally, it was certainly good enough for the publisher – and there is always an acknowledgement to her – well deserved – in every one of my publications.

I have just completed a third edition of my book on the Versailles Settlement for Palgrave and have included a new chapter on the changing attitudes towards the peace treaties over the last century. That chapter concludes as follows:

It is deeply ironic that Keynes came to regret writing the book that has shaped attitudes to the settlement for so long. In 1936 Elizabeth Wiskemann, a journalist and academic, met Keynes at a party and, much to her own surprise, found herself saying, "I do wish you had not written that book." To her greater surprise Keynes

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<sup>1</sup> <https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/atributetosallymarks.pdf>.

replied, “So do I.”<sup>2</sup> It still remains to be seen whether anyone will heed the plea of Sally Marks at the conclusion of her vigorous defence of the treaty in a review article “Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany and the Versailles Treaty, 1918-1921.”<sup>3</sup> Accepting that, as the inevitable product of compromises in the face of an immense task and the competing ambitions of the powers, the treaty was and is unpopular, she declared “However, it is time – and past time – to abandon old myths and simplistic propaganda-driven explanations and to address instead the inherent problems and the real reasons why this cornerstone of the interwar era has for so long attracted torrents of criticism despite the contrary opinion of those who know it best.”<sup>4</sup>

So – fittingly - Sally has the last word. She was a tenacious scholar, a skilful writer and a doughty controversialist. I shall miss her emails, her friendship, her sense of humour and her wisdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Europe I Saw* (HarperCollins, 1968): 53.

<sup>3</sup> Sally Marks, “Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany and the Versailles Treaty, 1918-1921.” *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 85, No. 3 (September 2013): 632-659.

<sup>4</sup> Marks, “Mistakes and Myths,” 659.