

## **OBITUARY: MICHAEL LAWRENCE DOCKRILL, 1936-2018**

**by Keith Hamilton**

Professor Michael Dockrill was a founder member of the British International History Group (BIHG). On a wet Thursday evening in December 1987, he joined others attending the British International Studies Association's annual conference in the students' union bar in Aberystwyth. The atmosphere was convivial, drinks were ordered and consumed, and a lively discussion ensued on how historians might achieve better representation at future gatherings. The result, after a further and more formal meeting at Bristol Polytechnic (now the University of the West of England), was the formation of BIHG, of whose executive committee Mike, as he was more usually known, was the first vice-chairman. He would later become chairman and one of the mainstays of the organization, promoting its interests, regularly attending its conferences, and delighting other participants with his wit and humour.

By the time of the BIHG's initial conference, Mike Dockrill, was already a well-established diplomatic historian. He had recently been promoted to a senior lectureship in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, and was the author of books and articles on British foreign and defence policy in the twentieth century. But neither in his education nor early career could he be said to have followed a linear trajectory. Born in Tooting on 7 November 1936, Mike was the only son of Hilda and Ernest Dockrill. His father was a postal worker and he and his wife brought Mike up in their semi-detached house in Ewell, Surrey, a suburb from which Mike never seemed quite able to detach himself. For much of his working life and retirement he resided within a five to ten-mile radius of his parental home. He was 'an 11+ failure' and, like the majority of his generation, he went from primary, to secondary modern, school, an experience which helped shape his progressive views on education and other social issues. In 1953 he secured a clerical grade job in the Foreign Office and was employed for some of his time there in Cornwall House, a building to the south of Waterloo Bridge which he would know again when in the 1990s it was purchased by King's College for its expanding campus. A more profitable experience followed when in 1955 he was called up for National Service in the Royal Air Force and found himself working in the Ministry of Defence for what, as he would frequently recall, was better pay. After his return to the Foreign Office in 1957 he was able to negotiate sabbatical leave and, having gained the requisite qualifications at night school, in 1958 he was admitted to the London School of Economics to read for BSc Econ degree in international history.

On his graduation in 1961 Mike returned to the Foreign Office, but subsequently left to study first for a masters degree at the University of Illinois, and then in 1964, for a PhD, once more at the LSE. There, under the supervision of Professor W. N. Medlicott, he began researching his doctoral thesis, 'The Formulation of a Continental Foreign Policy by Great Britain, 1908-1912', a work upon which he drew in the three-volume monograph he co-authored with Cedric Lowe, *The Mirage of Power: British Foreign Policy, 1902-1922* (1972). In 1966, whilst still researching his thesis, Mike was appointed lecturer in the Department of International Politics, University

College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Whilst there, he first met Laurence Martin, the then Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics, a distinguished academic who was soon to succeed to the Chair of War Studies at King's College London. However, Aberystwyth's geographical remoteness did not suit Mike and, though in later years he frequently returned there, he soon began to look for a position closer to London. Portsmouth Polytechnic (now the University of Portsmouth) beckoned and in 1967 he moved to a lectureship there. Four years later he was appointed a lecturer at King's.

Mike was a much-loved teacher and mentor in a prestigious and rapidly-expanding department. His lectures were popular with undergraduates and postgraduates alike, and his commitment to his students was legendary, assisting and encouraging their research and show-casing their work. Many who went on to become eminent scholars see him as having exercised a defining influence on their careers. Meanwhile, he maintained a steady academic output, co-authoring with Barrie Paskins, *The Ethics of War* in 1979, and with J. Douglas Gould, *Peace without Promise: Britain and the Paris Peace Conference, 1919-23* in 1981. Books on the Cold War and British defence policy followed in 1988 and 1989, and 1999 saw the publication of his illuminating monograph, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936-40*. He also co-edited several important essay collections, and he was founder and editor of the Palgrave/Macmillan series, *Military and Strategic History*. He was a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a member of its Council from 1998 to 2002; the Chair of the King's College Senior Common Room from 1989 to 1995; and the British project leader of the British Council's British-German Academic Research Collaboration Programme from 1993 to 1995. Promoted Professor of Diplomatic History in 1995, he remained at King's until his official retirement in 2001. Thereafter, he continued his collaboration with former colleagues, and was always ready to offer guidance to those embarking on further research and to serve as an examiner of theses.

Mike Dockrill's private life was not invariably happy. His marriage in 1970 to Felicity Deen proved short-lived and ended in divorce. But in the mid-1980s he met and married Saki Kimura, a research student at King's, who in the following decade was appointed lecturer and later, professor in the War Studies Department. The two were mutually supportive and formed a formidable intellectual and social alliance. Unfortunately, in 2006 Saki was diagnosed with cancer, and after a long and brave fight with the disease she died in 2009. Mike was naturally devastated by her death, but despite his own deteriorating health he remained a familiar figure at seminars and other academic gatherings, always ready to extend a friendly hand to newcomers to an academic world he knew so well. Gregarious and fun-loving, he was a wonderful raconteur, always ready with a fund of anecdotes and other tales, many of which related to his own misgivings and mishaps. To know Mike was to enjoy Mike.

Professor Michael L. Dockrill died peacefully in his house in Cheam on 17 August 2018 after he was diagnosed with cancer.