

## Tony Drake Memorial Event: 22 May 2013

Thank you for coming along today to join in this celebration of the life of Tony Drake, and for giving me the opportunity to say a few words about his impact on the Ramblers. The more I thought about it, the more important I could see it has been—there is much we take for granted now that has only come about because of Tony.

Reading the many tributes which have appeared to Tony over the last year, one might be forgiven for thinking that he spent all of his time out in the fields and the hills, actually doing practical things—surveying paths for all sorts of different reasons, building stiles and waymarking. However, the way in which I first encountered Tony, and indeed the way in which I primarily worked with him was in Ramblers Committees—the FSC/Legal Panel, the EC/Board of Trustees and GC.

I think I can pinpoint very precisely the time when I first met him and I reckon that it was probably about 9 am on the morning of Saturday 29 September 1984 at a meeting of the Ramblers Footpaths Sub-committee. In those days, the Executive Committee of the Ramblers (now the BoT) had three sub-committees: Footpaths, Finance & Administration and Membership & Publicity. They each met for about three hours on a Saturday morning before the main EC which met for the rest of Saturday and Sunday morning. The sub-committees considered matters within their remit in great detail. Not only matters of broad policy but, in the case of FSC, detail relating to which kinds of stile and gate the Ramblers should advocate, and the wording of legislation, and details of individual rights of way cases, including any on which legal action might be taken.

Now, that first encounter with Tony on that late summer morning was very deceptive. My first impression was of a quiet and shy man who was going to struggle to make his voice heard amongst the enthusiastic, and, dare I say, vociferous experts on that subcommittee—Jerry Pearlman, our long-term Honorary Solicitor; Alan Howard and Geoff Eastwood who both went on to become Ramblers chairman, and Jack Burling (still campaigning in Cornwall now). How wrong could I be? It very quickly became apparent that Tony could more than hold his own, and not only that ... his tenacity, his determination, and his attention to detail left the others standing. If there was an issue which he believed could be changed in some way to make life better for the walking public then he would pursue it to the end, unwavering and ignoring any obstacles and any contrary views or reservations expressed by his fellow committee members, or the secretary of the Committee, Deputy Director of the Ramblers and co-author of the 'blue book' (the footpath secretaries 'bible'). This was how he made such an impact on the national scene.

I need to pick out some of those key national issues, and will start with the blue book. The first edition was published 30 years ago this year, and while I was researching its background for an article celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I was told by John Trevelyan that the impetus to do a deal with the OSS to produce the first book came about not least because of pressure from within the Ramblers for the production of a "Footpath Manual", led, of course, by Tony Drake, who had successfully proposed a motion to National Council (as it

then was) on the subject. The book is now on its 4<sup>th</sup> edition with a 5<sup>th</sup> one being considered.

One image of Tony out-of-doors which I do have is of him unloading from the back of his estate car a portable demonstration stile. Stiles were, of course, a very big deal for Tony, and I think it was his involvement with the Cotswold voluntary warden service which led to his interest. When not erecting them himself, he was instructing other how to do so, but he also played a very important behind the scenes role when it came to stiles. It's not widely known, but there is a British Standard for Stiles but once you know that you will not be surprised to learn that Tony was involved in the production of the first British Standard for stiles back in 1979. For anything for which there is a British Standard, there is a Technical Committee which oversees the production of the Standard and Tony represented the Ramblers on the specialist Panel which reported to that Technical Committee. I found some paper work while preparing for today which I think includes a picture of one of his portable stiles, and it includes wording which is now the accepted norm: "the choice should be the least restrictive option in the order gap, gate, kissing gate, stile. If there has to be a stile it should be as user friendly as possible."

He was also our representative on something called the CCPR OS Committee (that stood for the Central Council for Physical Recreation Ordnance Survey Committee). This was the battle ground for one of Tony's major successes on the issue of 'white roads'. For those of you not conversant with the term 'white road' these are the many routes shown on OS maps with no colouration at all—they literally appear as white roads and the public has no way of knowing if there is a public right of way over them. Tony's attack on this was two pronged. Firstly he persuaded the Ramblers to do a survey of all highway authorities to find out if they held information about which routes are maintainable at public expense in map form (they have to hold a register called the 'list of streets'). Having found out that most of them did, he then persuaded the Ramblers to campaign to get OS to make use of this information. John Trevelyan remained sceptical that they would do this and thought that the only way forward would be to make claims for these routes (where appropriate) to be shown on definitive maps. However, Tony wouldn't give up. It took about twenty years but eventually OS gave way, and working with each highway authority they obtained information about which white roads were maintainable at public expense which has enabled them to depict a good proportion of white roads as ORPAs – other routes with public access – shown with dots on Pathfinder and Landranger maps. So Tony's legacy is there on every OS you look at—at the very least, there is a public right of way on foot on each of those paths.

Another issue on which Tony had robust views was waymarking. Once the Countryside Commission had come up with the standard coloured arrow format for waymarking, Tony encourage Ramblers nationally to take it up and promote it. Here I think he was at odd with some of his fellow-Ramblers in that he was a keen advocate of painting waymarks with a stencil, something which has pretty much fallen out of favour now. However, Tony's argument was that this method was much more versatile than having to hammer in a plastic or metal disc. I am sure that in Gloucestershire you will still be able to find some of his waymarks. He certainly did much work in the Forest of Dean.

One of the more esoteric arguments which seemed to come up quite regularly at FSC was the question 'when is this even now but suffice to say, Tony insisted that the FSC discuss this on a number of occasions and that he presented several papers which were all about whether a path being diverted under the provisions of the Highways Act 1980 should have a pivot point. (If anyone wants to discuss this further see me afterwards!) This was one issue on which Tony did not manage to take the rest of the Committee with him.

Eventually, like all good things, the FSC was wound-up, the organisation of the EC/Board having evolved. For a number of years though it took on a new incarnation in the Legal Panel, which only looked at rights of way legal cases, not wider policy issues. Tony retained his seat, his knowledge being too valuable to cast aside. Early on in the days of the Legal Panel Tony asked for a case in his own patch to be considered for professional legal support. Throughout this time on the national scene, he was, of course, Area Footpath Secretary for Gloucestershire. The case involved a path at Maisemore, running beside the Severn. The county council had made an extinguishment—a permanent closure order for the path because it had been, in part, eroded by the river. The Panel agreed to provide legal support and Jerry Pearlman represented the Ramblers at the public inquiry and defeated the order. However, the county council subsequently appealed the Inspector's decision not to confirm the order in the High Court. The Ramblers joined the Secretary of State as second defendant in the case, but in the High Court the judge was satisfied that the Inspector was wrong in having decided that the right of way existed but on different alignment (because of the erosion) and she quashed the decision, remitting it to the Secretary of State for re-determination. Eventually a second inquiry was held which we lost. This case highlighted a yawning gap in the legislation, namely the need for paths which are subject to erosion to be protected before they are lost, and for highway authorities to be required to provide replacement paths where paths are lost because of erosion. These issues are now on the legislation shopping list, but I know that it was a lasting regret to Tony that we have made very little headway in persuading successive governments to do anything about this, and it is a problem which has got worse over the last ten years, with heavy rain and flooding incidents, making erosion of riverside paths much more prevalent. Some of the last conversations which I had with Tony were on this very issue.

Throughout the time which Tony played such a key part in these various national committees, there were few if any meetings that he missed. There was one occasion though when he told me that he didn't think he would make it to a meeting. His excuse was that he would be flying back from a Ramblers holiday in Hawaii that day. That fine I said, don't worry and have a wonderful time. Much to my surprise, just as the meeting was about to begin, who should appear through the door but Tony. Having flown in to Heathrow from Hawaii and having been up for I don't know how many hours, he decided that there was just time to make it to Vauxhall so came to the meeting instead of heading home.

Of course, throughout all of this time on the national scene—and he had attended every GC meeting from 1952 until about 5 years ago, Tony was Area FP Secretary for Gloucestershire, a task he commenced with his surveying of literally hundreds of paths in the 1950s when the preparation of the original definitive maps was being undertaken in the wake of the 1949 Act. This was a

never-ending task because although the definitive map for Gloucestershire had long been published, even in more recent years Tony was still chasing and trying to rectify anomalies which he had identified.

Also, in a related context, he was a keen proponent of a task which the Ramblers undertook for OS survey for a number of years. This was 'proof reading' new editions of the 1:25000 series maps (Pathfinders). For many years, shortly before a new map was due out, OS would send us marked up copies on which proposed changes were highlighted. The idea was that Ramblers volunteers would check these. Tony undertook this task with his usual enthusiasm but I noted looking back through the old minutes that there were numerous occasions when he had to enter into an argument with OS because they appeared to have ignored his comments.

Being an AFS itself is no small task, and of course, Tony went about it a big way, making sure that he went to Group meetings so that he had regular contact with his Group FP Secretaries, he had all path orders for Gloucestershire which local authorities are required to serve on the Ramblers sent to him so that he knew exactly what was going on right across the county. And, of course, talking of things right across the county, there is no more fitting place to be talking about Tony than here, right on the Cotswold Way, devised by Tony and another Ramblers stalwart Cyril Trenfield, taken on board by Gloucestershire CC and then eventually designated as a National Trail.

He also initiated the Gloucestershire Parish Footpath Competition, and spent a lot of time administering that. All this is in addition to the staggering amount of work which Tony undertook in Wales for the YHA there, on Offa's Dyke, and in devising the Cambrian Way.

I knew Tony for just short of 28 years, and although we met very regularly, and often spoke on the phone (and latterly exchanged e-mails – Tony was keen on new technology) it is only since his death last year that I have truly realised the scope and magnitude of the work which he undertook for the Ramblers and the other outdoor organisations which he supported. In the last few years before he died, Tony had become quite frail but he still phoned from time-to-time just to check up on things—when was the next 'Footpath Worker' going to appear, had I heard what the Government was proposing to do, had the Ramblers made a response on some issue. His voice was very quiet, but it was still the old Tony who had made such an impression on me at my early FSC meetings, making sure that the Ramblers was on the ball, and out there making the case for walkers.

From what we have heard today, we owe it to Tony to keep up that fight, because we know that is exactly what he would have wanted.

*Janet Davis, RA Senior Policy Officer (Footpaths) May 2013*