

**D'ARCY DALTON – BLUE PLAQUE UNVEILING**  
**Speech made by Jim Parke, Chairman of the Oxfordshire**  
**Fieldpaths Society, at the unveiling on 18 August 2017**

In thinking of what I was going to say this morning the subject of my text would be the well-known statement that has appeared on Ordnance Survey Maps, probably from the very time these maps were first printed and published in the nineteenth century. It is:

**The representation on this Map of a Road, Track or Footpath is  
no evidence of the existence of a right of way.**

It could be said that d'Arcy Dalton devoted his life to making sure that most footpaths represented on maps, particularly those in Oxfordshire and former parts of North Berkshire, were indeed public rights of way.

D'Arcy Dalton was born in 1893 in Birmingham. One of the interesting facts I learned about him in the Lincoln College archives was that d'Arcy matriculated in 1913, having attended the same school in Birmingham, King's Edward VI, that I went to some 50 years later. In 1914 D'Arcy joined up, eventually serving on the western Front before being invalided home in December 1917. His association with the Oxford Fieldpaths Society began in January 1926 when the society (then called the Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths, and Commons Preservation Society) was formed. Its inaugural meeting was held at Oriel College. This was six years before the Ramblers Association was established.

At the time there was great concern over the expansion of the urban housing in the city, and many footpaths, too, were falling into disuse as a result of the spread of car ownership and fewer agricultural workers on the land. The society determined to walk the paths – their programme showed walks taking place every fortnight, compared with twice a week at the present time. The annual subscription was *2s 6 ½d*, equivalent to £13 today.

The first Secretary, and driving force of the society, was F.C. Roby. D'Arcy joined the committee and became its honorary assistant secretary.

Now the first major significant contribution made by d'Arcy Dalton to Oxfordshire's PRow network was to persuade the Society to produce a map, based on Oxford, which would show all the footpaths that it considered to be Public rights of Way. This took nearly three years to produce from inception to publication. D'Arcy was helped by two members of the committee; the map at a scale of 2 miles to the inch was centred on Carfax, covered 144 square miles, and was published by the Ordnance Survey. Each path had to be checked and verified by d'Arcy and his two colleagues.

1000 copies were printed and published in 1933, the first edition quickly sold out and a reprint of 1000 copies followed in 1935. This map therefore could be regarded as the first definitive map of the footpaths in the County, and was available some 15 years before such definitive maps had to be produced under post-World War 2 legislation. It is interesting to note that the wording of the relevant text in the map index of information on these maps (at the insistence of the Ordnance Survey) was:

**A footpath believed to be public is shown as a single continuous red line, a public bridlepath similarly but with the letters B.R. added.**

In 1940 F. C. Roby died, and d'Arcy Dalton was elected as OFS secretary. During the Second World War the affairs of the Society were handled by a Mr. G. A. Bennett, because d'Arcy volunteered for service in the Observer Corps. In the latter part of the war he worked in Whitehall as secretary to the Army War Council.

It was after the War that d'Arcy made his greatest contribution to the County's Path network. The 1949 legislation of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act required all County Councils to prepare Definitive Maps and Statements of all those footpaths considered to be Public Rights of Way. In Oxfordshire and Berkshire this duty was delegated by the county councils to the parish councils to provide the basic information on such paths. One parish council in Oxfordshire said that this was not necessary as d'Arcy Dalton and the Oxford Fieldpaths Society had already compiled the necessary information. Other parishes asked the OFS/D'Arcy for advice on what paths were to be listed in their areas. The 1933 survey map would have been a very important source of information for this purpose. For three years from 1950 to 1953 while the definitive Map and Statement was being prepared d'Arcy was in constant demand for this. In June 1953 Oxfordshire published its Draft Map. It received many objections, nearly 500, particularly from landowners who were averse to footpaths on their land being listed as a Public Right of way. The OFS itself claimed 135 paths which the County Council, at this provisional draft stage, were not inclined to include on the draft statement. However many of these were accepted following further correspondence with d'Arcy.

For the next 2 years between 1954 and 1956 d'Arcy attended numerous full-day hearings dealing with over 130 paths that were still in dispute, including any claimed by the society. This involved a great deal of research, for in every disputed case D'Arcy needed to prove the validity of the claim. This involved the use of Enclosure Awards and interviewing witnesses who could claim many years of usage. Finally the society was successful in 57 contested cases of paths which had gone to a further appeal stage. A similar pattern of work for paths in the then North Berkshire area in 1957/8 saw d'Arcy succeeding in eight hearings, particularly saving disputed paths in Cumnor, Wootton and Wallingford town.

Thus d'Arcy Dalton was instrumental in saving many miles of PRowS which otherwise would have been lost to the successive generations of walkers and horse riders who use and enjoy them today, and will continue to do so in the years to come.

As a result of d'Arcy and others throughout the country, the OS nowadays bears the legend on its index on its Explorer and Landranger map series under a heading PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

**Public rights of way shown on this map have been taken from local authority maps and later amendments. Rights of way are liable to change and may not be clearly defined on the ground.**

However the OS in its Customer Information Heading now includes the wording to read:

**The representation on this map of **any other** road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way.**

Only two additional words but what a difference!!

Those of us who use them share with the County Council the responsibility to see that they are!!

In 1959 d'Arcy became chairman of the OFS; he was also very active in the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England for Oxfordshire, particularly on its footpath sub-committee, and also the Oxford Preservation Trust. He helped to establish the Oxfordshire branch of the Youth Hostel Association. In 1977 he became OFS President, serving in this capacity until his death in 1981.

In 1986, to celebrate the 40th year of the founding of the OFS, the society inaugurated the long-distance 67-mile recreational route and in his honour named it the d'Arcy Dalton Way. It runs from Wayland's Smithy on the Ridgeway northwards along the western edge of the County to Wormleighton reservoir in Warwickshire.

It is fitting that in the 90th year of the society's life that it agreed to make a successful submission to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board for a plaque to be erected on this house in Great Milton that he and his wife Olive (Julia) lived in for 20 years from 1961 to 1981. We are most grateful for the current owners of the house Mr and Mrs MacMahon, who are not able to be with us today, for their permission for the Blue Plaque to be erected on their property.

I therefore have great pleasure, and the privilege, of unveiling the Blue Plaque to commemorate Wytton Perowne d'Arcy Dalton, truly the Champion and Protector of the Public Rights of Way in Oxfordshire.