

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

(Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society)

President J Ibbott

Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2005-2006

Chairman L Spiess

Vice-Chairman L Gammon

General Secretary D Godfrey

Minutes Secretary Dr. Elizabeth Adams

Treasurer J A Eyre

Membership Secretary Mrs G Seiffert

Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp

Publicity J Lampert

District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey

City of Oxford D Hallam

South Oxfordshire N Moon

Vale of White Horse J W Andrew

West Oxfordshire vacant

Other Members Mrs V Haskins

B Colley

Scrutineer of Accounts Janet Isaac

Website address: "www ofs org uk"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work and
reports of obstructions

Appropriate District Secretary

Membership

Membership Secretary

Walks – specific dates

Leader named in programme

Renewal subscriptions (when not paid by Bankers' Order) should be sent to the Membership Secretary. Cheques should be made payable to "Oxford Fieldpaths Society". Taxpayers are asked to sign a Gift Aid declaration if they have not already done so.

Members wishing to assist the Committee by inspecting specific rights of way may offer their services by writing to the appropriate District Secretary. For information on public paths and general topographical detail, sheet 164 of the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger series is recommended (scale 2cm to 1km, roughly 1.25" to the mile). For fieldwork greater detail is shown on the 1:25000 Explorer series (scale 2cm to 1km, roughly 1.25" to the mile), available from Blackwell's in Broad Street and many other booksellers and stationers.

The Society is affiliated to:

The Open Spaces Society
The Ramblers' Association
Friends of the Ridgeway
Cotswold Line Preservation Group
The Chiltern Society

1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

It was a great honour to be invited to take over as Chairman at the last AGM and a particular privilege to be asked in this our 80th year at a time when we reflect on our prestigious beginnings and look forward to the work ahead.

Your committee has taken the opportunity to consider the Constitution, which is largely unchanged since its inception in 1926, and found that it is still relevant today. We have also assessed how well we are carrying out the objectives that have been set for us.

Unquestionably the walks programme has gone from strength to strength through the sterling efforts of our walks leaders and by the sensitive balancing by Sue Crisp of the many varied requirements from our membership as she puts it together; a difficult job amidst the odd plea for shorter, longer, afternoon, weekday, evening walks. Looking at the programmes and judging from the numbers that vote with their boots I feel that we are getting it about right within the resources available. But we are not complacent and are always open to suggestions.

Although not part of our brief, it has become apparent that our membership enjoys not only the walking but the friendship that ensues as witnessed by the very large responses to our more social activities. These offer the opportunity to meet friends made over the years, some of whom are no longer able to walk with us. Such events as the AGM, with the bonus of Vaughan Haskins' wonderful tea and cakes, Lew Gammon's skittles evenings, Brian Colley's (and Lew's) very popular annual outings and the residential trips are always well supported and often have to be limited to first come, first served. Your committee is responding to this need and is working on a few new ideas for the coming year. Although they are not all strictly 'walking' activities, if it means that we keep our membership interested, healthy and vibrant then it is all to the good.

We are extremely lucky in Oxfordshire to have some wonderful walking country on our borders with the Cotswolds to the north-west and the Chilterns in the south. Because of their spectacular beauty they are well walked and, as a result, are well maintained and signposted. In the heartland of Oxfordshire this is less true. Walks leaders, when planning walks, have found difficulties with broken stiles, bridges and overgrown paths that have deterred them from offering walks in such areas. Although David Godfrey, Nick Moon and John Andrew work hard on the legal aspects of fieldpaths, as a society we are not doing very much to survey the paths on our patch, nor to improve the signposting and safety, so that we and others can continue to walk them with impunity. We used to do more, and we are required to do more by our Constitution. The committee has therefore asked Lew Gammon to head up a team to start work on these projects. Please give him your support. I am sure he will make them into fun days for all involved.

We are very sorry to announce that Derek Hallam has found it necessary to retire after many years as District Secretary looking after the City of Oxford. We would like to extend our warm thanks for his long and diligent service. You will be aware that

we have been asking for volunteers to become district secretaries for some while now. This need is now acute. If you are a stickler for detail, love exploring old maps, enjoy writing the odd letter and mixing with the powers that be in the footpath world, please consider joining our team. It is a vital and fascinating job with skills to be learnt and which we are in danger of losing unless new people step into the breach.

During the year we were sorry to learn of the death of Basil Willett and Roy Carmichael, both of whom gave many years of valiant service and support to the society. We extend our condolences to their families. It is sad to lose such good friends.

In making the preparations for our 80th Birthday Celebration it was fascinating to re-discover our roots while researching in the Oxford Records Office and as reported by the Oxford Times on 23rd December. I am sure Frank Roby, our founder, would have been well satisfied to have seen so many beautifully attired members (sans boots) in the charming Champneys Room at Oriel College enjoying a toothsome buffet before they danced the evening away to the folk music of Lazarus with the steps being ably called by member John Dawson. Special thanks go to Liz Adams for making the protracted arrangements with Oriel, who did us proud; to Brian Colley for ensuring that we had a magnificent cake with a splendid OFS logo; and to Lew Gammon for organising the music and spearheading the organisation. Surely an evening to remember.

So many people work tirelessly behind the scenes to make this the pleasant and successful society it is, that it is not possible to thank them all individually but I am sure that you would wish me to offer a special thanks to all the walks leaders (David Godfrey has been leading for 30 years) who enable us to offer such a varied programme; to Gretchen Seiffert and John Eyre for their quiet work behind the scenes drumming up new membership, keeping our accounts in order and giving a valuable helping hand with the residential visits; to Jeff Lampert for keeping our website in good shape; and to Liz Adams for making sense of our deliberations, no mean task, and keeping the minutes.

It goes without saying that without you, the members, we would be nothing. Thank you for your continued support and remember to spread the word. There is nothing like personal recommendation.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2005. Lewis Spiess has now become Chairman. Derek Hallam has resigned from the Committee, and we need a successor. We also need someone to fill the vacant position in West Oxfordshire. Some of the other members of the Committee are also looking for successors.

The role of District Footpath Secretary includes looking after rights-of-way in the district and commenting, through the Committee, on proposed changes such as claims and diversion orders. Attendance at Public Inquiries may also be necessary, and the ability to research documents in the Record Office and other sources can

help but is not essential. This role is of critical importance in ensuring that the Society meets its constitutional objectives.

3. MEMBERSHIP

On 1 January 2006 our total membership was as follows:

Associate members	1
Life members	67
Annual members	<u>359</u>
	427

Of these, 58 are new members; 44 have left or not renewed subscriptions. It is worth comparing the figures with those of 1994 (101 life members, 273 annual, 61 associate) and 1989 (135 life, 383 annual, 90 associate). This shows that, since the Society's high point in terms of total membership, we have lost half the life members and all but one of the associates – the parish councils whom we recruited in the mid-1980s. From our low point of 1993-6 we have slowly been recovering annual members to the extent that we are beginning to be within sight of our 1989 levels. Committee members, walk leaders and ordinary members have worked hard to introduce new members. It is important to keep up this work, so that we can see a further increase in membership during 2006.

We still need more members to provide suitable candidates to succeed the present Committee. We need over 50 new members each year just to keep the membership stable. We need to work hard to keep our numbers up to ensure a healthy society. Can members be persuaded to introduce a friend (or, indeed, several?)

4. FINANCE

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet are appended to this report. They show how the Society's income has been used and to what extent funds are being carried forward to meet future liabilities. There was a net surplus of £621, and net balances now stand at £31,150.

The cash reserve on deposit has been kept at approximately one year's expenditure in an account giving immediate access, to be used for unforeseen expenditure.

Following the continued upturn in the Stock Market the Reserve Account, mainly invested in shares in funds specialising in Charities, has shown an increase of £3,532 in addition to the above surplus.

Gift Aid

An excellent way to increase the income of the Society, without costing you a penny, is to complete a Gift Aid declaration. The Society can claim back the tax paid on your subscriptions and donations and will (at current rates) receive a minimum of £1.12 per member. A condition is that you must pay Income or Capital Gains Tax at least

equal to the amount claimed by the Society. The Gift Aid form now appears at the back of this report; you need to fill one in only if you have not already done so.

Projects

The Committee wishes to spend some of its reserves on specific projects. These can include grants to other bodies for objects which are part of the Society's own objectives. If you have any suggestions please let a member of the Committee know.

5. PUBLICITY

Our walks have only sporadically been publicised in the *Oxford Times*. We still need to generate more inquiries that are translated into new members. As is noted above, the *Oxford Times* had an article about our 80th anniversary on December 23.

If you are connected to the Web please visit the site ("www.ofs.org.uk") and give us your opinion so that the site can be updated to suit members. There is a direct e-mail connection back to the Webmaster.

The sale of sweatshirts and T-shirts with the Society's logo continues. You can publicise the Society by sporting the logo; orders and sales are being co-ordinated by Elizabeth Adams, who can be contacted on 01865-726031.

6. WALKS PROGRAMME

The Walks Programme has been very successful in 2005. There were 80 walks covering 586 miles, with the shortest being 3 miles and the longest 12 miles. We have a very strong team of 30 volunteer leaders who provide a varied and interesting programme from gentle strolls to challenging full day walks. Our grateful thanks must go to them for their continued hard work and involvement. The programme aims to provide something for everyone, and all walks have been enthusiastically supported, with a few attracting well over 40 participants. Leaders choose their own areas and this year there has been a slight movement away from the Chilterns and more towards the Cotswolds. The east and north-east of the county are less popular, perhaps because of the M40 corridor. Our website contains details of the location of walks. To access them you need to click on the grid reference.

The residential visit this year was to the Isle of Wight to join in the Annual Walking Festival. While this visit was very successful, with a pleasant stay at the friendly Riviera Hotel, most of us felt that the festival walks were disappointing. The large numbers on walks, over 50 in some cases, meant long waits at stiles and huge gaps between leaders and back markers. We all thoroughly enjoyed the impromptu walks led by John Eyre and Maurice Wenban and we thank them accordingly.

Lew and Pat Gammon organised a splendid annual outing to the New Forest. The sun shone and we all appreciated the programme of walks over heaths and by watercress beds. Brian Colley led a band of OFS members on a fine stroll through London parks and along elegant streets. It was a very good outing and we thank him.

Forthcoming events

The 2006 residential visit to Shropshire was fully booked within weeks of publication. In the pipeline are other trips to out-of-county venues, as well as the Annual Outing. The 2006 visit is to Bath following the Skyline Walk, organised by Brian Colley.

7. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

7.1 The Monitoring Group and Access Forum

The County Council continues to maintain liaison with rights of way societies, CLA, NFU, the Countryside Agency and District Councils through half-yearly meetings of the Monitoring Group. The Group receives reports on expenditure, on the work of Field Officers and the Tasks Team, and on the repair of roads and bridges.

Chris Hall is still the only representative of walking interests on the Access Forum. This body has been considering the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which is still in progress. At present only the general principles are being discussed.

The backlog of path claims has now increased so that it is five years before anything is even considered. Despite this, it is essential to submit any claims early, as there is a deadline of 2026 on the use of documentary evidence. This may seem a long way away, but only a few cases per year are being processed.

The access map of the county came into force on October 31; this land will appear on OS maps shortly. There are 23 sites, plus registered commons, in Oxfordshire. Some have no access by public right of way; we will press for this to be provided.

7.2 County Matters

The Council still struggles to keep up with path problems. We are now receiving details of path closures in advance. However, there is an increasing number of closures on the grounds of public safety, some of which may not be strictly justified.

While this report was being compiled we have seen a circular from DEFRA asking councils to report to the Rural Payments Agency (which controls farm subsidies) any breach of cross-compliance conditions. When reporting problems such as ploughed fields or paths blocked by crops) please alert the County Council to that effect.

8. OUT ON THE GROUND

8.1 Cherwell

The diversion order for Hampton Gay FP.12 at the railway has been confirmed. We are resisting "security" diversions at Lower Farm, Bucknell and at Bodicote Mill, where there has been a path beside the house since at least 1768. The diversion for the new school at Princess Diana Park, Banbury has been confirmed. The dedication of paths at Crouch Hill, Banbury has been completed and they are now waymarked.

8.2 Oxford City

As mentioned elsewhere, Derek Hallam has resigned and a successor is urgently needed. The BMW case has gone curiously quiet. The case for the Trap Grounds was lost on appeal; it is not known whether the case will go to the House of Lords.

8.3 South Oxfordshire

In South Oxfordshire 2005 was a year of some progress with more County Council money being devoted to public rights of way, but some areas still being understaffed.

The saga of the 1998 Definitive Map Modification Order to add various routes to the County Definitive Map continues. The Inspector's Report on the August 2003 inquiry was finally published in February; while reaffirming the previous Inspector's decision to add Tiddington-with-Albury FPs 19 & 20 to the Definitive Map, overturned the previous Inspector's decision that most of Harpsden 25 was a road and the rest a footpath and only retained a short cul-de-sac section as a footpath. As we did not have any new evidence to offer, we were unable to object to this, but others, including Harpsden Parish Council, objected and obtained some additional evidence and we represented them at the fifth (!) public inquiry into this order, most of which took place in October but which only closed in December. A decision has been promised by the end of January but was not available at the time of writing.

A public inquiry was held in May into the proposed diversion of Goring FP30, part of the Thames Path, to which we did not object, and this was subsequently confirmed. Orders to divert Shiplake FP23 and Moulsoford FP6 were also confirmed unopposed. In addition, South Oxfordshire District Council has made orders to stop up parts of the width of Chinnor BR12 at Henton and Aston Rowant FP13 at Chalford to enable a garden extension and house extension respectively; these are likely to proceed subject in one case to the reservation of a walkable verge and in the other to the prior removal of obstructions further along the path. A diversion order has also been made for Wallingford FP1, part of the Thames Path, to take the path over a bridge across a new inlet in front of the Oxford University Boat Club boathouse which is currently under construction and we have now withdrawn our initial objections to this order. At the moment the path is subject to a temporary diversion round the back of the building site. A proposal has also just been received to divert Rotherfield Greys FP24 at Cowfields Farm to a straighter line avoiding what has now become a garden.

We also remain concerned at the proliferation of temporary diversion or stopping-up orders made on 'health and safety grounds' which frequently seem spurious and last much longer than would seem strictly necessary. Following one such stopping-up of part of Aston Rowant FP20 for 10 months in 2004 due to a dangerous wall and similar problems with Wallingford FP26 near the castle ruins, we are now faced with an extended temporary diversion of Little Wittenham FPs 4 & 7 at Castle Hill due to allegedly dangerous trees. We are seeking to press Oxfordshire County Council to take a more robust line in such situations where we feel that the justification for such orders needs to be checked rigorously and landowners should be forced to take more urgent action to remedy genuine problems.

Following continued problems with the surface of the South Oxfordshire section of the Ridgeway between Hempton Wainhill and Swyncombe Down, the winter closure of the RUPP section to vehicles has been made permanent and further work has been in progress to eliminate the deep ruts which make its use hazardous and unpleasant particularly in wet weather. We therefore hope that these measures will finally bring about a lasting improvement to the extremely boggy conditions which have prevailed for much of the year on some of the more shaded or less well-drained sections of the route.

On a positive note, the County Council's programme of annual summer mowing has resulted in many paths being cleared of their annual scourge of nettles. It appears that a combination of the consequent increase in use and the prevention of the mown nettles seeding is leading to fewer nettles coming back, thus reducing the problem of subsequent regrowth. Some particularly less-used paths remain to receive attention, but now that the County Council has a second team, further improvements can be expected in the future.

8.4 Vale of White Horse

The appeal on Hardwell Lane has been thrown out, and this ancient road remains on the Definitive Map. We alerted the Council to the three Anglo-Saxon charters that mention the road by name, and the Inspector's report mentioned this.

8.5 West Oxfordshire

The obstructions to the path at Pebble Court, Swinbrook have been cleared. The owner of Finstock Manor is trying to divert the path in front of the house behind a thick leylandii hedge, which will obscure the view; this is allegedly tied to the provision of a permissive path from the proposed new exit to Finstock. The case of the path at Westwell between the church and the parsonage is due to go to the Secretary of State.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We again would like to thank all those members whose hard work and support have helped make a useful contribution to rights of way work in the county. We are also grateful for the work of our colleagues in the Chiltern Society, Open Spaces Society, CPRE and Ramblers' Association.

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

BANKER'S ORDER FORM

Please complete this form and send it to the Membership Secretary

To.....
(name and address of your bank)

..... Account Number.....

Please pay to Girobank plc, Bootle, Merseyside GIR 0AA, for the credit of the account of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (Sort Code 70-00-02, Account 85394908) the sum of

£..... (.....)
(amount in words)

on January 1st and thereafter on the same day of each year for a period of years/until further notice.

SIGNATURE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

GIFT AID DECLARATION

Name
Address

Postcode

Please tick one of the following options

I wish the Oxford Fieldpaths Society to treat as Gift Aid Donations all donations (including membership subscriptions) I have paid since 6 April 2000 and all donations (including membership subscriptions) that I may pay from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise. I understand that I must pay Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax retained by the Society.

OR

I am not a UK taxpayer

Print FULL name

Signed

Date

Please print your full name; we need your first names to claim tax from Inland Revenue.