

## **OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY**

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

President J Ibbott

### **Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2006-2007**

Chairman L Spiess

General Secretary D Godfrey

Minutes Secretary Dr. E Adams

Treasurer J A Eyre

Membership Secretary Mrs G Seiffert

Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp

Publicity Mrs S Carmichael

Website J Lampert

#### District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey

City of Oxford vacant

South Oxfordshire N Moon

Vale of White Horse J W Andrew

West Oxfordshire J Asbridge

Other Members Mrs V Haskins  
L Gammon  
B Colley  
Mrs H Burlingham

Scrutineer of Accounts Janet Isaac

Website address: "[www.ofs.org.uk](http://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 4cm to 1km, roughly 2.5" to the mile), available from many booksellers, stationers and outdoor clothing suppliers.

The Society is affiliated to:

The Open Spaces Society  
The Ramblers' Association  
The Chiltern Society  
The Oxford Preservation Trust

## **1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

The AGM gives a chance to reflect on what has happened over the past year and to thank those who have worked tirelessly to make it a very enjoyable year for our membership, whilst carrying forward projects in line with our Constitution and ensuring that we remain financially viable. It is also an opportunity to look ahead, to see what to keep, what to introduce and what to drop. One of our biggest problems is going to be finding sufficient people within our membership willing and able to organise events. There are quite a few who will volunteer to help, which is great – but we do need a few more people who are willing to pick up a project and run with it. Those leading lights that we do have, providing us with a wonderful programme of events, have been doing so for many years. It is only fair that some of us newer members should help by taking up the reins for a while.

Lew Gammon is and has been a fantastic organiser over many years as well as a popular walks leader. His skittles evenings are always fully booked and the barn dances look like going the same way. He has also taken leading roles in waymarking, path clearing and maintenance projects. His knee, however, is causing him some concern and he will have to curtail some of the more physical activities – so once again we need someone to organise such vital work.

Brian Colley has long been a popular figure at the centre of things, willing to help or organise events. Unfortunately, he is finding that family commitments are reducing the amount of time that he, too, can give to OFS.

Also, as mentioned last year, we need someone to take over from Derek Hallam as District Secretary for the City of Oxford. Nick Moon has been valiantly covering the City as well as South Oxfordshire, despite spending much of the year working in Germany.

Please remember that many hands make light work. Consider what you can do to lighten their burden so that we can continue to give pleasure to so many while at the same time keeping our fieldpaths in good shape for future generations. As one walks and talks one cannot fail to be impressed by the great number and variety of very talented people that we have within our membership. Consider whether you could offer a little of that talent to the common good.

If all this makes you feel a little gloomy – don't let it. We have had a fantastic year. The Skittles Evening in April; the Shropshire visit and walking the Wychwood Way in May; the London outing in August; the Bath Skyline walk and our involvement with the Cherwell Walking Festival in September; the Forest of Dean and Severn Bore in October and our first Barn Dance in November have all been hugely enjoyed by participating members. Add to this some 100 walks throughout the year, some 150 reports of problems with fieldpaths - recorded, logged and submitted to the County Council; and some 23 battles over proposed diversions researched and fought on your behalf. Nothing to be gloomy about there. And all for £4 a year.

Which brings me to finance. Our balance remains healthy, the increase thanks, almost entirely, to the upturn in the stock market (remember it does go down as well as up). Our social events are designed to be, and are, self-funding, and our

membership fee pays, in large part, for running the society: printing of mail-shots, postage and stationery. This is helped by the tax recovered from the Inland Revenue (thanks to the good response re Gift Aid), generous donations and interest from our investments. Although your committee has been open to funding suitable projects, none have presented themselves this year.

We were also able to introduce the new-style newsletter during the year, which has been favourably received. However, as the intention is that it should be a light hearted look at the year, as seen through our members' eyes (rather than this formal report from your committee), the editor does need ideas, articles and photographs from you to make it a success. Please pass items through any committee member.

I am indebted to the committee for their continued support. Decisions are not always easily arrived at, but with a little heart searching, their collective wisdom and great good will and humour we get there. The committee members all wear many hats and all work extremely hard on your behalf and are worthy of your grateful thanks. We are also indebted to our walks leaders, who give their time, energy and knowledge so freely. We hope that you, the members, have enjoyed your year. Just take a little time to consider what you can offer to make the coming year even more successful.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2006. We welcome John Asbridge (West Oxfordshire), Helen Burlingham and Sheila Carmichael to the Committee. Jeff Lampert's role has been split in two, keeping the web-site but handing over publicity to Sheila Carmichael. Nick Moon is filling in as District Footpath Secretary for Oxford City, but we need somebody on the ground to help with the Warneford Meadow and BMW issues. Other members of the Committee are also looking for successors.

## **3. MEMBERSHIP**

On 1 January 2007 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	65
Annual members	<u>377</u>
	442

Of these, 66 are new members; 50 have left for various reasons. We no longer have any associate members (Parish Councils etc). 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 in 2007.

The reminder printed in the walks programme has resulted in members paying more promptly, and so has the completion by more members of bankers orders.

## **4. FINANCE**

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet are appended in the 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 revenue deficit of £275 and accumulated balances now stand at £35,943. The net deficit is due to the transfer of £1,000 to our investment account.

This year the Society received three major donations totalling £590, for which we are most grateful. This is not to lessen the contribution made by the many members who round up their annual subscription, again many thanks.

Following the continued upturn in the Stock Market, the Reserve Account, mainly invested in shares in funds specialising in charities, has shown a net increase of £4,793.

In the 'Cash at Bank' section of the Balance Sheet we have introduced a new current Social Account. This is to cater for the many social events the Society now runs. The idea is to keep the hundreds of payment cheques out of the main account and have a reserve to pay the holding deposits and up-front expenses prior to receiving members' money.

### **Gift Aid**

In 2005 the Society targeted members who had not completed a Gift Aid declaration. The return was most gratifying and this is clearly shown by the increase in tax recovered from the Inland Revenue. The Gift Aid form now appears at the back of this report; you need to fill one in if you have not already done so.

## **5. PUBLICITY**

Our walks have normally been publicised in the *Oxford Times*. We still need to generate more inquiries that are translated into new members.

If you are connected to the Web please visit the site ("[www.ofs.org.uk](http://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 year 2006 has seen the programme offer no less than 106 walks covering about 687 miles led by 34 different walks leaders. We are so fortunate in our society to have such an enthusiastic and dynamic group who lead for us, and I must thank them once again for all their hard work throughout the year. It is impossible to mention everyone, but perhaps we need to thank John Eyre, who led an extended three day walk along the Wychwood Way in May, and Brian Colley, who led the ever popular London walk as well as the interesting annual outing to Bath with the Skyline walk. Michael Payton led the most walks over the year. Most walks are within the county but there have been many going into our neighbouring ones as well, like the

event to see the Severn Bore at first hand and the walks in the Forest of Dean. We have a strong band of walks leaders but we always welcome new faces. A number of leaders now lead in pairs, which gives someone at the front and someone at the rear. The residential visits have been running now for six years and always attract a lot of interest. This year's trip to the Long Mynd Hotel in Shropshire was very much enjoyed by all and our thanks go to the leaders, Lorna Fullard, John Asbridge, Maurice Wenban, Brian Colley and John Eyre for leading us over hill and valley in rain and shine. I would welcome any suggestions you may have about the running of residential trips, from new locations to offers of help with the organisation. 2007 sees us going to the coastal area of East Sussex.

## **7. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP**

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.

The Access Forum has now published a Rights of Way Improvement Plan, but has no funds to do much about it.

During the year the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group welcomed the publication on 21 February of the updated and first consolidated Definitive Map. To increase attendances it was decided to admit a second representative of participating organisations on a trial basis. This had a positive effect on attendance figures as several organisations (including OFS) sent an additional representative. This is a positive development enabling other members of the organisations to experience meetings at first hand, thus broadening appreciation of the Group's role and value, while retaining the continuity of having one regular attendee. Amongst the other issues discussed were the 37 Definitive Map modification applications to upgrade various rights of way to "byway open to all traffic", most of which had been ruled out-of-time by the Government's decision to reject such applications retrospectively. As this was expected to be challenged in the High Court, the County Council decided to leave these applications in the queue to be investigated as and when they come to the top of the pile, by which time any legal challenge should have been resolved. In some cases, also, where the routes concerned are currently public footpaths or bridleways or not on the Definitive Map at all, it will, in any event, be necessary to clarify whether these claims would still justify orders to add the routes concerned to the Definitive Map or (where appropriate) upgrade them to bridleway or restricted byway (i.e. a public right of way on foot, horseback or with a horse-drawn vehicle). Furthermore, the Senior Field Officer reported that, despite a considerable increase in the number of new reports received, Council staff had been able to increase the number of problems resolved so that the resulting increase in the overall caseload was only small. However, with a net caseload of 6086 problems on 31 August, representing an average of over one problem for every single public right of way in the County, and only 70% of paths in a 2.5% sample survey being found "easy to use", it is clear that additional staff are needed if any substantial inroads are to be made in this backlog.

## **8. OUT ON THE GROUND**

### **8.1 Cherwell**

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. A major development at College Fields above the canal at Banbury has been passed, and will affect Canal Lane at Bodicote. Minor diversions at Mixbury and Finmere around house extensions have been agreed.

### **8.2 Oxford City**

The main activities affecting public rights of way in Oxford City in the last 12 months have concerned the path network around the Churchill Hospital and Warneford Meadow where most of the public rights were only formally recognised after a 15-year battle in 2002. In the intervening period, several of these paths had become obstructed by development while others had been allowed to become overgrown. We have since been pressing to secure the clearance of obstructing growth, to obtain solutions to the problems arising from development and to prevent further encroachments. While we have succeeded in obtaining the clearance of FP129 and we understand that FP122 may now also have been cleared, a new problem has arisen with FP113 where the City Council diverted the path to avoid a relocated car park only for the builders to fail to keep to the plans and to obstruct the line of the diversion with a new embankment. At the time of writing the County Council is pursuing this with the developer.

In August planning applications were also submitted for the development of Warneford Meadow which would ruin the recreational value of this path network and we are supporting local people in fighting this. In particular, we are hoping that an application to register the site as a town green may thwart this philistine development of a unique rural oasis in the urban desert of East Oxford.

Another serious threat to the Oxford path network is posed by BMW’s attempts to close Oxford BR75 and Roman Way, a vital link between Blackbird Leys and Blackberry Lane (from the Baldons) and Shotover Country Park. Local opposition to this is being led by the newly-formed Oxford Area Bridleways Association. This is welcome as it publicly demonstrates that horseriders do use and care about their bridleways and are prepared to fight for them. OFS and other user groups are only too pleased to assist as walkers and cyclists would also be adversely affected by this closure. The County Council has deferred a decision on the matter until the next meeting in February, so it will take some time for the case to come to court.

Finally, on a more positive note, we wish to welcome the excellent work organised by the County Council to reconstruct and improve the Thames Towpath between Folly Bridge and Donnington Bridge which had been affected by major subsidence. We very much hope that similar work will be possible further upstream to remedy problems around Grandpont, Medley and Godstow. In addition, the welcome decision of the County Council automatically to add all newly-adopted urban paths to

the Definitive Map has resulted in 5 paths in the Rewley Road area as well as a bridleway at Wolvercote being added to the new Definitive Map.

### **8.3 South Oxfordshire**

In South Oxfordshire the most notable news in 2006 has been the final confirmation with modifications of the 1998 Definitive Map Modification Order which has added two worthwhile paths in Tiddington-with-Albury, byways in Bix and Harpsden, an urban path in Thame and three quarters of Harpsden FP25, which we apparently won because it was waste of the manor and the last lord of the manor had disappeared in 1894 leaving no identifiable will. This last was a major element in four of the five public inquiries needed to resolve objections to this order for which the Society had been one of the two original applicants. In the end, the third Inspector charged with the order reversed his previous decision to delete all but a short cul-de-sac section of path and reinstated the link between Hunt's Green and FP13 which forms part of a popular circular walk from Henley. Only the section between FP14 at Upper House Farm and Pond Copse was ultimately deleted due to challenges to use of the farm drive and the fact that too few witnesses remain alive who could remember using the cross-field alternative which appears to have been blocked off in about 1950. This long-running saga was beginning to resemble the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, or the Tangle.

Other orders confirmed in the course of the year were a modification order which rerouted Nuffield FP6 in the vicinity of Blenheim Cottage, another which added a village path in Garsington and a stopping-up order which reduced the 25ft width of Aston Rowant FP13 set out in the local Inclosure Award to enable the extension of an adjoining cottage.

Negotiations have also taken place following a consultation about the diversion of Rotherfield Greys FP24 at Cowfields Farm, which appear likely to result in the restoration of part of its definitive line which had been ploughed out and the diversion of FP23 and another part of FP24 to lines which make sense on the ground and so are likely to reduce confusion and eliminate current anomalies.

To end on a positive note, one of the most effective elements of the County Council's work in recent years has been the annual mowing programme which principally serves to combat the summer scourge of paths blocked by nettles; while in early summer one can have bad luck and find a path which the teams have not yet reached, the vast majority of paths affected seem to be tackled sooner or later, so that this unpleasant feature of summer walking now seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

### **8.4 Vale of White Horse**

The infilling of Radley Lakes has been given the go-ahead by the Secretary of State. A temporary diversion round extended gravel workings at Tubney has been agreed. Thames Water are planning an enormous reservoir, which will be three times the size of Farmoor with embankments covering four times this area again, to provide



capacity roughly equivalent (unless I have got the figures mixed up) to about a year's leakage. The whole footpath network between Drayton and Ardington will disappear, along with the road from Steventon to the Hanneys.

The case of Sparsholt BR19, where it is claimed that the bridleway is through a field and not along the canal towpath, is due to be heard at inquiry on January 25.

### **8.5 West Oxfordshire**

The case of the path at Westwell between the church and the parsonage was heard at a public inquiry from September 5 to 7, adjourned to November 16. The case turns on whether a bridleway can be routed through a churchyard, and the law on such matters seems to be vague in the extreme. A privacy diversion at Rest Hill Farm, Worton has been allowed, and similar diversion proposals at Chastleton and Alvescot are being resisted.

There is a proposal for a huge mansion to be built at Fawler for the younger brother of the Marquis of Blandford. It seems likely that, if this is passed, Fawler BR2 will become an access road and the Oxfordshire Way, which runs alongside the site, will be affected by the noise and dust of building works.

## **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 change an existing Banker's Order or to start a new one.

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

Sort Code..... Account Number.....

Please pay to Alliance & Leicester Commercial Bank plc, Bootle, Merseyside GIR 0AA, for the credit of the account of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (Sort Code 72-00-02, Account 85394908) the sum of

£..... (.....)  
(amount in words)

on January 1<sup>st</sup> ..... and thereafter on the same day of each year until further notice.

SIGNATURE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

**GIFT AID DECLARATION**

Please complete this form only if you have not already given us a Gift Aid Declaration or your tax status has changed.

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.