

## **OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY**

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

President J Ibbott

### **Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2008-2009**

Chairman L Spiess

General Secretary D Godfrey

Minutes Secretary Dr. E Adams

Treasurer J A Eyre

Membership Secretary Mrs G Tyson

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 Asbridge

West Oxfordshire vacant

Other Members Mrs V Haskins  
Mrs H Burlingham

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 4cm to 1km, roughly 2.5" to the mile), available from many booksellers, stationers and outdoor clothing suppliers.

Details of footpath problems should be reported to John Asbridge (above) or directly to Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Service at Library Service Headquarters, Holton, Oxford OX33 1QQ, tel. 01865-810226. Please ensure that details of the location are as accurate as possible.

The Society is affiliated to:

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

## 1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

After a wet summer, a cold winter, high fuel costs and financial gloom many people are feeling a bit low. Happily, in the OFS, spirits remain high, the membership bright, fit and cheerful.

Once again we can record a steady increase in our membership, an increase in the number of walks and variety of places visited and an almost embarrassing growth in numbers attending many of the walks. The undoubted success of the expanding number of social events would be amazing if we were not also aware of the meticulous care given to detail by those organising these functions. Nor should we forget the efforts of those who work tirelessly out of the limelight, researching in libraries and elsewhere and doing battle with the landowners and authorities, to keep our network of footpaths intact and walkable. The newsletter continues to be popular with members, especially those who can no longer walk so regularly, as it keeps them in touch with our varied activities whilst, perhaps unfairly, reminding those who were too slow off the mark with their bookings what they have missed.

Walking the Green Belt Way, the day trip to the Isle of Wight, the summer social and picnic and the YHA weekend, all new initiatives this year, were very well received and are likely to be repeated in the near future.

It is ironic that success brings its own problems. Too many people on a walk, especially if there are stiles, slow it down to an undesirable degree and make life difficult for the leader. As there is no pre-booking, we can never know how many will turn up. However, we are monitoring trends and will take steps to relieve the predictable hot-spots. There is a limit as to how many people can be accommodated on a skittles evening and still have enough turns at bowling. Residential trips are limited by the accommodation available, and outings by the coach seats available. Your committee is conscious that an increasing number of people are disappointed when the house full signs go up and is working hard to think of ways of duplicating or increasing the number of activities. However, this puts added strain on the few volunteers who run these popular events. Many of these stalwarts have been doing this for many years and it is becoming critical that fresh people come forward with new ideas and to lend a hand.

Finances remain adequate for our purposes. As most of our assets are invested in the stock market, their value has fallen recently in line with other investments but as we have no pressing needs they can remain intact. As such, they only represent a paper loss and will recover in due course. It is worth remembering that only four short years ago it was felt, by some, that our assets were too high.

Membership remains at £4 per person for this year - outstanding value for money. With the ever increasing postal charges and printing costs, coupled with reduced interest from our investments and a potential increase in our insurance premiums (once membership reaches 500, as is likely this coming year), subscriptions will almost certainly have to go up in the not too distant future.

While it is very satisfying to report membership increasing, 16 new members in January alone, we also have to remember that we lose old friends as well. We were

particularly sorry to hear of the death, recently, of Ken Willbery, who led many walks over the years, having been a member, with his wife Betty, since 1973. We extend our sympathies to Betty and the family and to the families of other members who have passed away during the year.

I was privileged to have been asked to join the committee five years ago, and to be chairman for the last four years, through a flourishing period in OFS history, thanks to the tremendous support of our members. Although the responsibility can seem daunting at times, it has been a rewarding and enjoyable task with such a dedicated team of committee members, walks leaders, and other helpers. As I retire from official duties, before I get too vapid, I would like to extend to all of you my sincere thanks for your help, encouragement and many kindnesses. By the end of this AGM you should have your new chairman in place, brimming with fresh enthusiasm, and a strengthened committee to lead you forward to even greater things. I know that it will be important to them that you continue to give them your wholehearted support.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2008. We still have no less than three vacancies for District Secretaries. This job involves reporting footpath problems, responding to requests for diversions, and checking possible claims for new footpaths. Most of the relevant documents for checking claims are in the County Records Office in Cowley or the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies in the Westgate Library. We badly need people to undertake this work, as it is one of the main planks of our charitable status.

Lewis Spiess and Sheila Carmichael are standing down from the Committee at the AGM. We thank them for their sterling service over the years.

## **3. MEMBERSHIP**

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	62
Annual members	<u>425</u>
	487

During 2008, 72 new members joined the group and 47 left for various reasons. The membership is still increasing and more new members are always welcome.

Since becoming Membership Secretary I am trying to collect details of members' e-mail addresses. This can be an economic way of communicating. If you have an e-mail address and regularly check your messages please send a brief message to [gwynethyson@btinternet.com](mailto:gwynethyson@btinternet.com) so that I can add your address to the records.

## **4. STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT**

Our work in protecting rights of way is a general public benefit. Our walks program, as a health benefit, is also open and advertised to the public.

## **5. 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 now being carried forward to meet future liabilities. There was a net revenue deficit of £10,908. The accumulated balances now stand at £24,097. The net deficit of income over expenditure of £5,206 is mainly the grant of £5,000 to the Ramblers' Association. The deficit of £5,702 on investments is due to a marked and rapid downturn in the value of stocks and shares throughout the year. Although the market value has dropped, interest and dividends are higher than last year. In the 'Cash at Bank' section the Current Account 1 balance of £624 shows a marked fall, as the grant of £5,000 to the Rambler's Association was made from this account during this fiscal year because it was not possible to make the grant in 2007.

The new current Social Account 2 continues to work well enabling the Society to pay up-front expenses such as deposits without drawing on the main current account. The idea is that all social events should operate cost neutral; as this is sometimes difficult to organise, the Social Account acts as an ideal buffer.

The Society has reached the point where income barely covers expenditure. This means that without additional "housekeeping" subscriptions will have to rise.

### **Gift Aid**

The number of members signing a Gift Aid Declaration has steadily increased. This is most gratifying and is clearly shown by the increase in tax recovered from the Inland Revenue. A Gift Aid form now appears at the back of this report; perhaps you would consider filling one in if you have not already done so, provided that you pay more tax than the amount claimed by the Society.

### **Standing Order**

The Society is most appreciative of those who pay their subscription by Standing Order. This method greatly assists cash flow at the start of the fiscal year; 2008 was yet another record year with the January bank statement running to seven pages.

## **6. PUBLICITY**

We continue to advertise our walks as widely as possible via The Oxford Mail (these can also be found via their website [www.events.oxfordmail.co.uk](http://www.events.oxfordmail.co.uk)). The Walks Programme is sent to Tourist Information Centres and Libraries throughout the County and to as many other organisations as we can. However, the best publicity of all is by word of mouth; once people come on one of our walks they invariably come again. Not only are we a motivated and friendly group but our excellent Walks Programme, supported by our first rate leaders, is both varied and interesting and covers much of Oxfordshire and surrounding areas.

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 link 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.

## **7. WALKS PROGRAMME**

A few facts and figures to start:

The longest walk was 13 miles whilst the shortest was 3.5 miles. The average length of walks was 6.5 miles and, not surprisingly, the most popular length of walk was 6 miles, there being 38 of these in total. There were 124 walks (including day trips) covering 802 miles. 45 members very kindly offered their services as walks leaders and we must thank them all most heartily. One leader who had a triple heart by-pass was back walking (gently) within 6 weeks, which must be a record. Well done.

Some highlights of the walking programme included:

- Walking the Green Belt Way around Oxford's periphery in 7 stages led by John Eyre and Michael Payton. This proved most popular with members joining various stages, but only 3 people completed the full circuit.
- Walking the second part of the d'Arcy Dalton Way, led by John Eyre, covering the northern part of the trail during the second May Bank holiday. Quite a challenge.
- Walking through 4 London parks led by Brian Colley, always a very well subscribed event.
- Walking from Freshwater on the Isle of Wight up Tennyson Down, around Totland and Colwell Bays back to Yarmouth. Barry and Helen Burlingham led an exciting trip in beautiful weather conditions.
- Walking in two groups from Kirtlington village hall, led by Liz Adams and Lew Gammon, to return to a splendid "bring and share" picnic tea.
- Walking around Stourhead Gardens as part of a wonderful annual outing arranged by Brian Colley. Then visiting the house before tea in the café.
- The Navigation Course on mapping and compass work led by John Dawson which helped 17 members tackle these aspects of walking, held at Kennington.
- Walking in the north Devon and Somerset countryside and coastal areas as part of the 5 day residential trip to the Unison holiday village at Croyde Bay. 38 members enjoyed pleasant weather and a varied programme.
- Walking in the challenging Peak District on a glorious weekend in September, staying at Gradbach youth hotel on a self-catering basis. The trip was organised by Gwyneth Tyson.

I must thank all the members who work so hard to make the walking programme so diverse and exciting. Long may it continue.

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

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group only met once in 2008 due to a key County Council representative being unable to attend the spring meeting. Papers were, however, produced for that meeting, so that we were kept informed of progress.

While the budget increase for 2008/9 was only £26,100, effectively a standstill budget, we were pleased to note the allocation of a further £400,000 from the capital budget to continue the programme of Thames towpath repairs in Oxford City. We hope this will suffice to remedy the backlog of work needed, as the advent of the recession makes further allocations of this kind most unlikely and "efficiency savings" of

£50,000 had already been planned for the Countryside Service over the next four years. We shall, however, continue to press for staff levels to be maintained and vacancies to be filled to prevent things going backwards, and for an increase in staff in the rights of way office where the valiant efforts of the committed existing staff cannot make any significant impact on the backlog of work.

A problem which we also raised with the Monitoring Group was the maintenance of unmetalled public roads, as Highways, who are currently responsible for them, give them the lowest priority and in practice have no money to repair them. Transfer of responsibility to Rights of Way, even without any extra money, would, at least, mean that they could receive a similar level of funding to byways with which they are, to all intents and purposes, identical in the rights of way hierarchy. This was to be considered by the County Council and we shall continue to press for action to prevent this category of public rights of way falling between the two stools.

## **9. OUT ON THE GROUND**

### **Cherwell**

We are resisting a “privacy” diversion at Bodicote Mill, where there has been a path beside the house since 1768. We are also opposing a similar proposal at Noke, though we may agree to another on the same path because of gaps in the Definitive Map at that point. Another at Lower Farm, Bucknell has gone to written representations; a decision is expected soon. Diversions round the Finmere Quarry extension have been confirmed.

### **Oxford City**

As reported last year, following a tragic accident in which a young cyclist on the Thames towpath between Botley Road and Medley drowned after falling into the river, the County Council decided that the condition of the towpath in this area must be improved and for the first time for a public rights of way project, allocated £300,000 of capital funding towards the project; this was topped up by a further £100,000 from the County’s Local Transport Plan budget and £50,000 from the City Council to make a grand total of £450,000. Again bad weather delayed progress, but it is now understood to have been completed and further work has commenced in the centre of Oxford to reinstate a section near Grandpont where bank erosion had forced walkers to divert through the nature reserve.

Further good news came following the inquiry into the application supported by our Society to register Warneford Meadow, an island of green popular with walkers in East Oxford, as a Town Green when the Inspector recommended its registration. If all goes well, this should thwart the Hospital Trust’s philistine attempts to obliterate this green enclave, upon which they have already unfortunately encroached, by building over what is left. It is therefore hoped that dog-walkers, joggers, playing children and others will now be able to enjoy this precious open space in perpetuity without further threats from bulldozers, bricks and mortar.

On the neighbouring Churchill Hospital site, following the City Council’s abject failure to ensure that provision was made for the affected footpaths before building work

started, or even to ensure that building work took place in accordance with planning permission, the issue was passed to Oxfordshire County Council to resolve. The County Council then came under pressure to force through the Hospital's proposals for diverting FPs 80 and 113 without giving proper consideration to an alternative which we believe to be more attractive for users, on the grounds that the cancer centre could allegedly not be opened until the footpaths were diverted from the site.

While the Society was also concerned not to delay the opening of the cancer centre and for this reason did not object to the proposed diversion of FP113, of which the present line was the only footpath crossing the actual footprint of the new building, we did not see why the diversion of FP80 (which is only affected by car parks and landscaping) needed to be finalised before the cancer centre opened and so we objected to this as we considered that the proposed diversion was markedly inferior to an alternative which we proposed. Indeed, although neither path has yet been diverted due to objections from others to the diversion of FP113, it is now clear that, while the late completion of building work has delayed the opening, the footpath issue will not and so attempts to blacken the names of the objectors on the grounds that we might be jeopardising the opening of the cancer centre and consequently the lives of its potential patients were totally unjustified.

In fact, what is at stake is that the Hospital authorities want to divert FP80 along the edge of woodland in full view of the hospital buildings and thereby to give it an urban setting whereas we are seeking to divert it through the wood out of sight of the buildings where walkers have the impression of being in the country. While the Hospital justifies this by saying that people use FP80 to reach the Hospital and that their route would be safer in the dark, as it is necessary at some point to leave FP80 to reach the Hospital and so an additional permissive path is needed, in any event, for this purpose, we can see no reason why recreational walkers (who generally only walk in the hours of daylight) should have to follow the same route.

At the time of writing, the Planning Inspectorate is in process of deciding the issue on the basis of written representations, and we expect a decision in the course of 2009.

## **South Oxfordshire**

In the spring a public inquiry was held into the proposed upgrading of Shiplake FP1, a cul-de-sac route from Mill Lane, Shiplake to the site of the former Wargrave Ferry, from restricted byway to byway open to all traffic. As the documentary evidence available appeared to support this classification, the route is a cul-de-sac for vehicles and so is unlikely to attract much vehicular traffic. The order was confirmed, but we understand that this decision may have been appealed and a consideration of the recent Winchester case may lead to the inquiry decision being overturned.

Definitive map modification orders were also made to upgrade Newington FP1 /Stadhampton FP7 from Newington to Ascott from footpath to bridleway and Holcombe Lane, Newington from footpath to byway open to all traffic (byways may not be ploughed, so byway status is essential for restoring at least the surface of the old lane). Some members may remember that in the 1970s the Society was involved in supporting Newington Parish Council and our then President, the late Lady Rothenstein, in trying to save Holcombe Lane from being ploughed up and having



the enclosing trees removed, but that this campaign failed. The late Tony Peet, a local horserider and solicitor, found further evidence and submitted fresh applications in 1995 to secure a public bridleway over the Newington-Ascott link and to classify Holcombe Lane as a byway. An inquiry has now been arranged for April at which Nick Moon will represent the Society. In addition, orders have been made to correct a definitive map anomaly at Binfield Heath and to add a footpath at Shiplake linking a long cul-de-sac path to Mill Road, which could enable a road section of the Thames Path to be rerouted along the riverbank. The public inquiry is to be held in May.

On the diversions front, the agreed diversion of Towersey FP4 has been confirmed and we have been consulted on possible diversions of Kidmore End FP3 and Nuffield FP25, which were agreed subject, in one case, to the provision of a greater width. In addition, we welcome creation agreements at Dorchester and Goring which have enabled the realignment of sections of the Thames towpath lost to riverbank erosion.

Jenny Beardmore, the Field Officer for part of the District has gone on maternity leave and Jonathan Beale, the Assistant Field Officer for the north of the county, has temporarily taken over. Jonathan has proved extremely effective in this rôle, both chasing old cases and taking up new ones, for example when planning applications have made the resolution of intractable long-term problems a realistic possibility.

### **Vale of White Horse**

Radley Lakes are no longer to be filled with ash; this will now be buried at an alternative site in Sutton Courtenay, and the area will probably be turned into a nature reserve. The application to give the area Town Green status is going to judicial review. Thames Water have held exhibitions regarding their proposed mega-reservoir, which will swallow up all the paths between Drayton and Ardington, along with the road from Steventon to the Hanneys. A diversion at Frilford is being opposed; two others in the same area have been dropped.

### **West Oxfordshire**

A privacy diversion at Alvescot has gone to written representations, and the decision is expected soon. A diversion at Burford for limestone extraction has been put into abeyance, as decreased demand caused by the credit crunch means that extraction is not needed. The proposed diversion at Chastleton will not now go ahead. An application to demolish a house at Curbridge will enable restoration of the path on which it stood. The Countryside Section doesn't always receive details of applications affecting paths; if you spot any, please report them to the Holton address above.

## **10. 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.