

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

President J Ibbott

Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2009-2010

Chairman Dr. E Adams

General Secretary D Godfrey

Minutes Secretary J Parke

Treasurer J A Eyre

Membership Secretary Mrs G Tyson

Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp

Publicity P Ewart

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

It was with a degree of trepidation that I agreed to take on the position of Chairman of the Society after several years as the Minutes Secretary. My main concern was whether, with a sometimes more than full time job, I would have enough time to devote to the Society. My fears were unfounded due to the support of all the committee members and this is an opportunity to thank them, and to welcome Peter Ewart and Jim Parke who joined the committee after the AGM, Jim taking on the task of Minutes Secretary. Firstly, however, I would like to acknowledge Lewis Spiess, who ably chaired the Society for the last four years, especially for renewing the format of the Newsletter which gives an opportunity for members, other than those on the committee, to make a contribution: reporting walks, outings, residential trips and hints for prospective walks leaders.

The success of the Society is reflected in many ways. The membership remains steady at about 500, with new members replacing those who do not renew. Gwyneth Tyson has been updating members' details, adding e-mail addresses which provide another means of communication. The walks programme expertly compiled by Sue Crisp remains extensive, with walks at the weekends and mid week, a far cry from the few that were listed in the programme when the Society was founded. Walks leaders, both long serving and new, make a vital contribution to the enjoyment of walking, often providing historic or literary context for the routes chosen. Continuing to walk the footpaths of the county and keeping them open is the basic tenet of the Society; even in inclement weather walks are popular. Planning and diversion applications are scrutinized and commented on by David Godfrey, Nick Moon and Peter Ewart, to ensure that they are acceptable. The impact of the Chiltern Railway proposals (Oxford-Bicester line) on footpaths is being closely monitored. Peter is also representing the Society on the Oxford Public Transport Plan.

This year the committee decided to increase the subscription to cover the increased costs of printing and postage as expenditure exceeded the income in 2008. This was a collective decision, guided by our Treasurer John Eyre who produced extensive information for us to come to a unanimous conclusion. Some members may have thought that this appeared to be illogical and unnecessary considering the investments held by the Society; however the conditions by which we remain a charity are that monies held should be used for the public good and not just for members. To this end we have made an initial contribution to the Donate a Gate scheme run by the Chiltern Society and three gates will be installed near Bledlow; each will have a plaque indicating that they are provided by OFS. The gates are to be installed in a circular walk route; a celebratory walk using them will be included in the winter programme. Contacts have been made with the Oxford County Council; the committee trust that we will be able to work with the Council in providing assistance closer to home. John Asbridge acts as our liaison with the OCC in notifying broken and unsafe stiles and gates so we are fully aware how many need attention.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2009. 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. As mentioned above, we welcome Jim Parke and Peter Ewart, who joined this year.

It has been noted during committee meetings that some members are still paying old subscription rates, including one still paying 50p from the days of the dodo. Please ensure that standing orders are amended to the current rate, which is £10.

3. MEMBERSHIP

On 31st December 2009 our total membership was as follows:

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Life members | 48 |
| Annual members | <u>455</u> |
| | 503 |

During 2009 once again there were 72 new members who joined the group and 42 members who left for various reasons. The membership is still increasing and has now topped the 500 mark but more new members are always welcome.

This year we asked you to send us your e-mail addresses, but so far have received very few. This is a pity since e-mails can be a quick and economical way of communicating. In the event of a programme change or cancellation, it would be very helpful to the Leader to be able to send a message giving details of the change. If you have an e-mail address and regularly check your messages please send a brief message to gwynethtyson@btinternet.com so that we have a record of your address.

May I also request members to send their subscriptions directly to the Membership Secretary, details on the front of the Walks Programme, and not to send them to Sue Crisp the Walks Organiser or to John Eyre the Treasurer. They both already have a heavy work load without having to forward these payments.

4. STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT

Our work in protecting rights of way is a general public benefit. Our walks programme, 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 increase of Income over Expenditure of £167; this was augmented by gains on Investments of £1,134 making a total revenue increase of £1,301. The accumulated balance now stands at £25,398.

During the year the Society made a grant of £500 to The Chiltern Society to assist in their programme of replacing stiles with gates to ease access to the countryside. It is hoped that this will become an ongoing commitment.

The value of stocks and shares has shown a slight rise throughout the year; this is reflected in the market value of our M&G Charifund Units. In the 'Cash at Bank' section all the Alliance + Leicester accounts show a slight increase.

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 achieve the Social Account acts as an ideal buffer.

The Society has reached the point where income barely covers expenditure. This means that subscriptions will have to rise in 2010 to £10 p.a.

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. The percentage refunded will decrease when the reduction in basic rate of Income Tax falls from 22% to 20%. 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 annual subscription by Standing Order. This method greatly assists cash flow at the start of the fiscal year. This year was yet another record with the January bank statement running to an impressive nine pages.

6. PUBLICITY

Having successfully entered the greater part of the winter walks programme into the *Oxford Times* On-Line Events for publication, the committee does not feel that OFS attracts sufficient walkers to justify the effort required. The constraints placed upon what is referred to as the "Event location" and an address and postcode for the start of each walk are also difficult to comply with. It should also be noted that the *Oxford Times* would not allow the use of Oxford Fieldpaths Society (even abbreviated to OFS) in the published event, so you will have seen our walks referred to simply as "Fieldpath walk". A reduced number of our summer walks will continue to be published in the *Oxford Times* in the hope that we attract one or two potential new walkers to the delights of our local countryside. The Walks Programme is also 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") 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

Another good year with plenty of walks offering something for everybody. We have offered bus and train walks as a new initiative and members seem quite keen to use public transport where there is a reasonably frequent service. Where service is somewhat sporadic this has not proved of any benefit. There were two highly enjoyable and well-supported residential trips. The Burnley one featured more

strenuous walking, up such features as Pendle Hill, while the Isle of Wight trip catered for both energetic and more leisurely walks. The London walk and the Annual Outing to Stourhead Gardens attracted very large numbers and both were highly enjoyable.

The weekly walking programme as well continues to draw large numbers and, as usual, we must thank all those volunteers who give their time so freely. Michael Payton again has led the most walks. Over the severe winter weather period three walks had to be cancelled for safety reasons, but five hardy souls did plough through thick snow from Kidlington to follow the leader, Robert Yates, on a very scenic and atmospheric walk in early January.

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2009 as intended.

Despite the economic situation, we were pleased to note that the 2009/2010 Budget envisaged an increase in line with inflation, but it is to be feared that we will not be so lucky in the coming year. In addition, there were the usual updates on national trails, the County Council's staff situation and progress with legal matters etc.

Other subjects discussed included improved liaison with Sustrans, the cycling charity, and the continued 'temporary stopping up' of Little Wittenham FPs 4 & 7 through woodland on Castle Hill, Wittenham Clumps due to allegedly 'dangerous' trees. As dozens of trees fall across the county's paths every year, but accidents are rare, we consider that this closure represents a dangerous precedent and that warning signs would be a sufficient response to this hazard.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Cherwell

The "privacy" diversion at Bodicote Mill, where there has been a path beside the house since 1768 (and possibly before 1086) has 13 objectors. The similar proposal at Noke, which we opposed, has been confirmed, but the owners' application for costs was refused. Another at Lower Farm, Bucknell, which we also opposed, has also been confirmed. An attempt to extinguish two paths at Westbury (Bucks), which are dead-ends because the connecting path in Mixbury (Oxon) was never claimed, has been abandoned; evidence for the connecting path is singularly lacking. There may be evidence in the railway plans for another path southwards from one or other of the dead-ends. Cherwell District Council has consulted on a long-term canalside development in Banbury; it seems that the path to the station will not be affected. The diversion of the footpath from the canal to the former Red Lion pub at the corner of the road to Thrupp has been confirmed; it now runs across the existing footbridge to the east. A diversion at Grange Farm, Godington, has also been confirmed.

The County Council, having approved the Ardley site for an incinerator, has refused planning permission on completely different grounds for both this and the Sutton Courtenay site, which have gone to appeal.

Oxford City

Following a period with a number of major issues affecting public rights of way in and around Oxford City, 2009 has been a relatively quiet year of consolidation.

As reported last year, major works which were underway on the Thames towpath between Botley Road and Medley have, indeed, been successfully completed and the work to reconstruct the eroded towpath at Grandpont, which had started in 2008, has also been successfully completed, but financial constraints forced planned improvement work between Folly Bridge and Donnington Bridge to be scaled down. We nevertheless hope that what has been done will be sufficient to ensure that no further major work will be required on the towpath during the recession. Work continues on the A34, with towpath users being diverted to the bridleway, but there has been no problem with the diverted route so far.

Following the Inquiry Inspector's recommendation that Warneford Meadow should be designated as a 'town green', we were also delighted to learn that the County Council accepted this recommendation and confirmed its registration, but, as was probably to be expected, the Hospital Trust was not prepared to abandon its philistine attempts to obliterate this green enclave, upon which they have already unfortunately encroached, by building over what is left and so they have appealed against this decision. It therefore remains to be seen whether the Courts overturn the County Council's enlightened decision.

On the neighbouring Churchill Hospital site, unfortunately the Inspector decided that he had no power to consider the relative merits of our alternative diversion proposals for Oxford FP80 and so he confirmed its diversion to a route in full view of the hospital although a far more rural alternative was available a matter of feet away.

On a more positive note, however, the part-time return of Jenny Beardmore from maternity leave resulted in her previous post as Field Officer for OCC's South-East Area being given to Jonathan Beale, her maternity cover, on a permanent basis and so it was decided to give her a role as Field Officer for Oxford City with a fixed time allocation as part of her revised duties. As previously this job had only been covered by the Senior Field Officer when his many other competing commitments permitted, we hope this will lead to the City's path problems receiving a greater amount of County Council officer attention so that long-standing problems can gradually be addressed and resolved and the state of the path network becomes more user-friendly.

South Oxfordshire

In South Oxfordshire, 2009 has been another fairly quiet year on the public rights of way front.

On the question of definitive map modification orders (to add missing rights of way to the Definitive Map etc.) two decisions were received, one positive, one negative.

In June we heard that the over-40-year battle to upgrade Holcombe Lane, Newington from footpath to byway open to all traffic and thereby permit its use by horseriders and stop it being ploughed out had been lost, in part because the elapse of time prevented any user witnesses being called and a key piece of documentary evidence had disappeared.

On a more positive note, however, the East Berkshire Ramblers' claim for Shiplake FP38, the missing link in the path from Mill Road to the Thames towpath near the former Lashbrook Ferry was accepted by a public inquiry and the order was subsequently confirmed, which should enable the Thames Path to be diverted via this path in order to include an extra mile of riverbank walking. Unfortunately,

however, one of the landowners has taken this to appeal to the High Court and so the question of whether the path can be opened up and used as part of the Thames Path remains in doubt.

On the diversions front, 2009 has been very quiet in South Oxfordshire. After initial problems a diversion order was made and confirmed unopposed for Kidmore End FP3 which provides a more direct link to FP2 involving less road walking. Negotiations concerning a possible diversion of Benson FP6 to avoid a proposed garden extension, however, proved more difficult as parts of the field through which the path runs are marshy or have dense beds of nettles and so we are concerned to achieve a dry route free of nettles, but so far no agreement has been reached.

Turning now to the condition of paths on the ground, Jonathan Beale, who was initially temporary maternity cover for Jenny Beardmore, has now become permanent Field Officer for the South-East Area. He, together with Mark Sumner (who covers the South-West Area), have been extremely effective in this rôle, both chasing old cases and taking up new ones, so that inroads have been made into the backlog of problems and this year an increased level of volunteer effort has also enhanced progress with the Chiltern Society's Path Maintenance Volunteers installing quite a number of kissing-gates in the south of the District to replace poor stiles and Thame/Wheatley Ramblers undertaking a number of small clearance jobs on overgrown stiles and footbridges in the north of the District. However a combination of a wet summer and staff shortages in the County Council's Tasks Team resulted in more paths being blocked with nettles etc. for longer than in recent summers.

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 is being turned into a nature reserve. 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. Their long-term resource plan has been turned down by DEFRA and will probably be the subject of a public inquiry, possibly because it is full of leaks and will not hold water. A diversion at Frilford FP7 along the Ock through the Millets site has been accepted; we await final details of the route, which is to be laid out avoiding significant trees, and also depends on finding the owner of a triangle of land through which a shortened route would pass.

Forthcoming event: June 5 is the 30th anniversary of the dedication of the paths round Farmoor, which replaced the path between the two reservoirs. Watch the programme for a celebration event on that date, the exact form to be decided.

West Oxfordshire

A privacy diversion at Alvescot, which we opposed, has been confirmed. 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. Claims have been made for a byway from the end of the aptly-named Water Lane at Charlbury to Dean; a bridleway cutting out some road walking from Dornford Lane to Tittenford Bridge between Rousham Gap and Ludwell; and a byway from the Radford-Kiddington road to White House Farm. A minor diversion at Stanton Harcourt has also been confirmed, as has a diversion at Churchill opposite a newly-

dedicated path east of Churchill Heath Farm. The diversion at Cornbury Lodge has attracted an objection, believed to be local.

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 also thank those who go out unheralded with secateurs that live in rucksacks, and clear out the rampant Triffids that block paths in summer – even those who are in even more danger of being left behind on walks than your Secretary. 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 1st 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.