

## **OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY**

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

President J Ibbott  
Vice President J Trumper

### **Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2012-2013**

Chairman Dr. E Adams  
General Secretary D Godfrey  
Minutes Secretary J Parke  
Treasurer J A Eyre  
Social Account A Willett  
Membership Secretary Mrs G Tyson  
Walks Organiser Mrs S Crisp  
Volunteer Co-ordinator P Ewart  
Publicity Miss M Jones  
Website A Willett  
District Secretaries  
Cherwell D Godfrey  
City of Oxford vacant  
South Oxfordshire N Moon  
Vale of White Horse J Asbridge  
West Oxfordshire vacant  
Scrutineer of Accounts Margaret Jones  
Website address: "www ofs org uk"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work	Website or Membership Secretary
Membership	Membership Secretary
Walks – specific dates	Leader named in programme

Details of footpath problems should be reported to John Asbridge (above) or directly to Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Service at Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford OX29 4TL, tel. 01865-810226. Please ensure that details of the location are as accurate as possible.

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

## **JACK IBBOTT (1921-2012)**

Jack Ibbott, rambler and campaigner, who has died aged 91, used to say, when confronting barbed wire across a public path or a no trespassing sign on moorland, 'I didn't fight for my country to be shut out of it by landowners'. He had served with the Royal Corps of Signals across North Africa, through Italy after Salerno and into Europe with the Normandy invasion. Shortly before demobilisation in 1946 he was mentioned in dispatches, but he never revealed the occasion for this. In peacetime he devoted himself to defending and expanding freedom of the countryside via the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (of which he was chairman) and the Ramblers' Association.

Professionally Jack was a civil servant, an accountant with District Audit (now the Audit Commission). He was married to Margaret, a chemist and teacher, for 64 years: being dedicated country walkers, they honeymooned in a rain-sodden Borrowdale. Together they served on the committee of the Oxfordshire Ramblers, and after his retirement Jack became the (honorary) national treasurer of the Ramblers' Association (1987-97). In this post, he did not confine himself to money, but cast his voice and influence on the national executive committee to campaign for public access and a tough political line against threats to public rights. He also served Oxford Fieldpaths Society for a long time, becoming secretary for Witney (to 1974) and the Vale (1974-1988) and chairman (1984-7) before serving as an ordinary committee member until 1992, then as treasurer for two years when Roy Carmichael was suddenly taken ill in 1997. From 1997 until his death he was also President, and chaired the annual meeting with his customary tact and efficiency.

In Oxfordshire he was noted for opposing schemes by farmers and landowners to distort the public-path network in favour of increased production, privacy or security. He was steadfast against these bogus manoeuvres when weaker brethren were inclined to give way. He brought his financial expertise to bear in the long 1990s campaign by the Ramblers, 'Give us some quo for our quid!' This exposed the scandal of landowners who got exemption from inheritance tax in return for public access, but who kept secret the whereabouts of the 400 square miles of land concerned.

Jack, Margaret and their three children lived in Kennington close to the Thames near Oxford. It thus gave him special pleasure in 2000, at a ceremony shared with David Sharp, 'the Father of the Thames Path', to present the Ramblers' contribution to the new bridge carrying the path over the river at Bloomers Hole near Lechlade.

A lifelong socialist, Jack backed the underdog, helping set up Kennington Overseas Aid Week and supporting numerous other charitable causes. He was a slight figure and quietly spoken, but he packed a principled punch not forgotten by any who encountered it.

A memorial walk is envisaged; however no details are available at the time of writing.

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

As this is my last report, it is an opportunity for me to review the past year and also to thank all the members and especially those on the committee who have encouraged me, giving knowledgeable opinions and suggestions over the last three years. I believe the OFS continues to be an active and successful society.

There have been periods in the past when attracting members to join the committee was difficult. Some years ago David Godfrey held multiple positions: Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and District Secretary. None of us would wish this to happen again, and so I would stress how important it is for members to make an active contribution, not just by joining the walks but to consider becoming a walks leader or joining the committee, neither of which are arduous undertakings. There are vacancies for District Secretaries at the present; one of the roles they undertake is to scrutinise applications for diversions and with plans for large housing estates on the edges of most of the towns surrounding Oxford as well as within the city. It has been reported there is a need to provide 20,000 more homes in Oxfordshire over the next fifteen years; therefore, ensuring that footpaths are not lost is extremely important. As the County Council Countryside Services would like to see Footpath Wardens in all of the parishes in the county, this is one area where OFS members could make a big contribution, either because we have members who already keep an eye on the footpaths they regularly walk or by being an external advisor to a particular parish. On several occasions I have asked fellow walkers if they would consider joining the committee and have met with negative responses; this is very disappointing and so I would ask all members to consider the long term future of the society and make a more active contribution.

Collectively we need to recruit new members to the Society as they will become the next generation of walks leaders and committee members. This year we have taken stands at the Abingdon Clubs and Societies Day, in April, and again in September at the Wychwood Forest Fair. We spoke to walkers and non-walkers alike handing out membership forms and copies of the walks programme. It is clear that families with young children find it difficult to commit to walking on a regular basis, and the walks and paths are not always suitable for little legs. Our aim in the year ahead is to attend more of these shows, so volunteers to help will be needed for this; already we have been invited to have a stall at the Burford Fair in June. This should raise the profile of OFS to the wider community both as a walking group as well as being able to advise the public on practical matters of unsafe stiles, overgrown paths and how to report them.

In April just after water restrictions were imposed the heavens opened and we have walked for months across soggy fields and had to make diversions where paths were impassable, and at the end of the year walks were cancelled. Stiles become hazardous after the first few walkers have climbed over them, making it more difficult for those at the rear of the group; so the safety on walks has become an important issue. To this end a Health and Safety sub-committee has been established: Sue Crisp, John Eyre and Peter Ewart, who have produced new guidelines for walks leaders – how to plan and lead a safe walk. I hope that all leaders both old and new will feel confident using. It is also a condition of our insurance policy that we do have such guidelines in place. Thank you John, Sue and Peter for this work. Despite the weather we have had an excellent programme of walks, with plenty of variety from short evening walks in the summer to the longer, including seven members who

finished the Oxfordshire Way, the southern section being walked over the very wet 'Jubilee Weekend' having walked the northern section the previous year in equally wet conditions.

The surveying work has continued: ten circular walks which contain sections of the d'Arcy Dalton Way were checked, details of missing waymarks, unsafe and deteriorating stiles and bridges were recorded. These were collated by Jim Parke and the report submitted to the County Council. The volunteer work of replacing waymark posts has faltered, as this is dependent on creating a team who are willing to undertake the hard physical labour required. If this is not forthcoming, the best contribution the Society can make is to assist the Council in surveying and reporting problems and to make financial donations for new gates to replace unsafe stiles and bridges. During the year we have made donations to both the Cotswold Wardens and to the County Council.

I would like to thank Janet Issac who has retired from being the scrutineer of the Society's accounts after twelve years. It is important that the Society's accounts are checked each year, we are grateful that she has performed this task.

It was with sadness we learnt of the passing of Jack Ibbott. A full obituary appears above; at a personal level I would like to record that I did not know Jack in his walking days but got to know him at the last few AGMs and the day in June 2010 when the committee agreed to award Jack and Margaret Honorary Life Membership in acknowledgement of their contributions to the Society over the years. It was during a short walk with them around Farmoor Reservoir I realised what a modest and self-effacing man he was who had an unbounded love for the countryside and being part of it out walking. We will all miss his gentle presence.

I have enjoyed my tenure as Chairman and look forward to making a different contribution to the Society in the years ahead.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2012.

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 documents for checking claims are in the County Records Office in Cowley. We badly need people to undertake this work, as it is one of the main planks of our charitable status; also we will at some time need a new General Secretary, as the present incumbent won't last for ever. Ideally the position would be occupied by someone who has been a district secretary for long enough to learn the ropes.

John Eyre wishes to stand down as Treasurer but will remain on the committee. There are four vacancies for ordinary members on the committee in addition to the vacant District Secretary positions.

Peter Ewart has now taken over the co-ordination of volunteer work, leaving Margaret Jones in charge of publicity.

## **3. 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.

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP**

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	41
Annual members	<u>280</u>
	321

During the year 31 new members joined, 15 informed us of their intention to resign and 32 did not renew their subscription. It is pleasing to see an increase in the number of new members.

I would like to say a personal thank you to everyone who pays their subscription very promptly, either by cheque or by Bank Transfer, and thank you for the cheery notes and cards which are much appreciated at this time of year.

It is now 4 years since the subscription rate was increased but we are still receiving a few bank payments at the old rate. It was decided last year that we can no longer afford to continue sending mailings to these members so any money received this way will be treated as a donation.

#### **5. FINANCE**

##### **Main Account**

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 Expenditure over Income of £54; this was offset by gains on Investments of £892 making total revenue increase of £838. The accumulated balance now stands at £28,294.

During the year the Society made two grants totalling £1,248. The Cotswolds Conservation Board received £468 towards the provision of five kissing gates to assist in their programme of replacing stiles with gates to ease access to the countryside. The Countryside Services of the OCC received £780 for similar replacements. 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.

Our thanks are due to Margaret Jones for stepping in as Scrutineer at the last moment to take over from Janet Isaac, whom we wish a speedy recovery after her spell in hospital.

##### **Social Fund**

The Social Account has been moved from Santander to Lloyds TSB to complete the separation from the Society's main accounts. The new account allows over-the-counter and internet banking rather than the postal system used by Santander. The balance of the account at 31st December 2012 was £2472.58 with the following liabilities:

£1000.00 loan from OFS main account

£625.00 for the Isle of Wight holiday

£322.00 for the Kirtlington meal

The balance after deducting the liabilities is £525.58 which has increased from the equivalent balance of £492.45 on 31st December 2011. The turnover for the year was £14,665.45.

### **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 has decreased with the reduction in basic rate of Income Tax 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**

Following a decision to increase our membership, we took stands at two local special interest shows to publicise what we have to offer, both with regards to our walks and the preservation of our footpath network. The first event we attended was the Abingdon Craft Fair; we were pleased to attract some interest from members of the public there. Following this we took a stand at the Wychwood Show, which takes place outside Witney. This is a splendid recreation of a traditional country fair, well suited to our outdoor activities. Our stand was situated in one of the main display tents, which was most fortunate as it proved to be the day the "summer" deluge started. We shared this tent with a broad range of other amenity groups of all kinds and it was soon apparent that the weather had not dampened the crowd's enthusiasm for the outdoors. Liz, Siobhan, Michael, Jim and I were soon in danger of losing our voices, talking to such enthusiastic potential members. So many proved to be so interested both in the range of walks and how we are working with others to preserve the footpath network, that we gave out all the information we had to hand in order to stem the flow of demand.

We were very pleased to have some new members who signed up to join us as a result of what was a most enjoyable day for us; I would give them a special welcome here. This was more of a seed-scattering exercise and we have learned a great deal about how we should follow this up, with display boards, OFS Mission Statement, and of course, throat pastilles and more handout information this year.

## **7. WALKS PROGRAMME**

Another good year of walking with a varied and interesting programme led by enthusiastic leaders and many thanks go to them for the way they give their voluntary services to the Society, for most leaders this means year after year. There were 131 walks covering 533 miles in 2012. The start of the year to the end of March saw drought conditions underfoot but by the end of the year some walks had to be cancelled or modified because of the floods. Each walking programme is checked for mistakes by John Eyre and Margaret Belfrage and thanks must go to them for their "behind the scenes" hard work. There were two residential breaks, one to the HF

house in Sussex at Abingworth and another to the North Norfolk Coast Path, linking Hunstanton with Cromer. Thanks to Sue Crisp and Alison Broadbridge for leading these ventures. There were two long distance ventures over two bank holidays. Liz Adams and Eme Pilgrim led the second part of the Oxfordshire Way in late May and Val Forsdyke and Judith Secker led the Wychwood Way in late August. Thanks to them. Liz Adams and Michael Payton organised the annual outing to the Winchester area, many thanks as well.

In July a Social and Training Evening was held for all walk leaders at Wytham village hall. The emphasis was on introducing a Health and Safety policy for the Society as required by our public liability insurance. There was a local walk followed by supper and then Sue Crisp outlined the kind of issues that will be encouraged as this side of our walking policy develops, such things as walking in single file on roads and the use of high visibility jackets.

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

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2012 as intended.

As was to be expected, these meetings have continued to be dominated by discussions about the cuts and subsequent reorganisation of the County Council. This has seen Rights of Way split between two departments but this is purely formal as the staff continue to sit together in one open-plan office in Signal Court, Eynsham and so, in practice, Anita Coghlan's Definitive Map team and Hugh Potter's Countryside Access team continue to work more closely together than when the one was in Oxford and the other at Holton Park. The fact that the Countryside Access team is attached to Highways also has certain advantages, as, after all, it is often necessary to use roads to link between public rights of way and sometimes improvements to verges or unmetalled roads are needed to gain access to public rights of way and these can be easier to obtain if they are in the same department.

Another important discussion topic has been the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, as, having extended the existing plan by two years to enable the effects of the cuts and consequent reorganisation of the County Council to be taken into account, preparations are now well underway for preparing a revised RoWIP designed to be more realistic in the present circumstances. The draft RoWIP incorporates a joint recommendation from OFS and the Ramblers that it should include adopting a policy of promoting and establishing a Parish Path Warden in every parish in the county.

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

### **Footpath Volunteering**

You will have read in the newsletter that, having started with some success with our first working party to install marker posts, our volunteering efforts were thwarted thereafter by the appalling weather last year. We hope we made up for this in some way by working with the Countryside Service in the preparation of the next Rights of Way Improvement Plan that will start next year. It is hoped that voluntary work with them will start in the spring this year.

### **Cherwell**

The Chiltern Railways dualling of the Bicester line will go ahead, having overcome objections concerning the effect on bats. HS2 will affect about six paths in Mixbury,



Finmere, Newton Purcell and Godington, including two at Finmere Quarry where infill of the land HS2 is due to cross will not end until 2039 because of lack of infill material, caused by increased recycling. The plans for the paths have been published; these involve minimal diversion and minimum disruption.

The test case on the “privacy” diversion at Bodicote Mill was heard in November, and has resulted in clearer definition of the word “expedient”. Councils will now be required to use a test of expediency independently of the tests of being in the interests of public or landowner; in effect this means that such factors as the historic nature of a route or the landowner’s behaviour can be used as criteria when making or refusing to make an order.

The plan to build 1900 houses on Ministry of Defence land at Graven Hill, Bicester, has now appeared on the Bicester Master Plan with an extra road to be built in 2021-2026 from (roughly) the A41 roundabout east of Bicester to the new Chesterton roundabout. This may result in reopening ancient footpaths across the site which were closed under the Defence Acts. The order to divert Bicester FP11 round the new hospital site has been confirmed. An order has been made to move Newton Purcell BR15 to its correct place nearer the Mixbury parish boundary north of the lodge at Featherbed Lane. There is a proposal to divert Swalcliffe FP7 at Ushercombe Farm to avoid contact between riders and stallions.

### **Oxford City**

2012 has not been such a busy year for progress on the City’s paths as those before.

As part of the reorganisation of the Countryside Service, Jenny Bagnall’s part-time post, which included looking after public rights of way in Oxford City, was the 0.5 in the 2.5 posts cut by the County Council, but instead the City was allocated to Dan Weeks, Field Officer for West Oxfordshire and parts of Cherwell on a caretaker basis.

A long-standing problem tackled during the year was improving the drainage of Old Marston BR8 (Back Lane), which has frequently been impassable due to flooding and then become overgrown; it will be interesting to see how successful this proves.

The County Council has also approved a scheme to improve Oxford FP74 from Edgeway Road to Croft Road, Marston, upgrade it to bridleway and create a spur to Rippington Drive.

There have, however, been no applications for diversions or additions to the Definitive Map.

### **South Oxfordshire**

In South Oxfordshire, 2012 has been a busy year on the public rights of way front.

Despite the apparent general slowness of the building industry, inexorable progress is being made with the Great Western Park development at Didcot and this has led to a whole rash of diversion consultations and orders and while the orders initially suffered from a veritable plague of technical errors requiring them to be remade, this has gradually been resolved. As far as the details of the proposals are concerned, we have been disappointed by the piecemeal way in which some have been brought forward as this makes it more difficult to see them in the context of the final network and a difference in philosophy from the planners as to how footpaths should fit into the development has also made it harder to reach a satisfactory solution, but regular meetings with the developers have fostered a greater understanding on their part of

what we are trying to achieve and have persuaded them increasingly to incorporate our ideas into the layout of the path network and to rectify several proposals which had initially been unsatisfactory. In addition, the developers have now started to fulfil their promise to dedicate the claimed footpaths across the site as public rights of way by creating Didcot FPs 33, 39 and 40 through the northern part of the development.

Other diversions have been proposed for Rotherfield Greys FP23 at Cowfields Farm, which would provide a straighter, more logical route and Sydenham BR7 at Sydenham Grange Farm, where the landowner has been asked to consider an alternative suggestion. A minor diversion of Watlington FP1 at Chestnut Farm near Cuxham has been confirmed and an order has been made to legalise the long-standing unofficial diversion of Ewelme FP22/38 round the perimeter of RAF Benson married quarters which arose from the emergency fencing of the site at the time of the IRA bombing campaign.

Definitive Map modification orders upgraded Highmoor FP21 to bridleway and thereby enabled riders to link between two nearby bridleways without riding along the busy B481 and added Chalgrove FP19, a former footbridge off Mill Lane leading to FP8, which has disappeared and needs to be replaced. The claimed public right of way across Chippinghurst Stepping Stones linking Chippinghurst to Little Milton was rejected by OCC but has successfully been appealed, so that OCC will have to make an order in due course.

Towards the end of 2011 several support struts were found to be protruding from the underside of the River Thames bridge on Drayton St. Leonard FP6. A subsequent inspection by the County Council resulted in its being condemned as unsafe and fenced off until a new bridge can be built. As this would be too expensive to come from the normal bridge maintenance budget, it is to be paid for out of capital spending and has been promised for 2013; we must just hope it does not fall victim to further cuts.

On a more positive note, two steep slopes on Whitchurch BR11, part of the Thames Path, have been given an improved surface and the longer one has additionally been given a narrow flight of steps at the side to give walkers a safer alternative. In addition, we took the opportunity provided by a planning application to replace a garage, which had obstructed Chinnor FP18 for over 40 years, with a house extension to point out what had happened to the footpath. The result is that, when work starts, a 1-metre-wide gap will be left beside the new house extension and the County Council will then get to work to seek the removal of other obstructions to the path which have accumulated in the meantime. In addition, Bow Bridge on the Oxfordshire Way at Waterstock Mill, which is a listed building, has had its broken and crumbling parapets repaired.

Planning permission for a house between the Ridgeway Path bridleway and the river at Goring has finally been refused. The design received extravagant testimonials from places such as Switzerland and California, presumably from the applicant's architecture pupils and associates, who were blissfully unaware that the proposed development was in utterly the wrong place and included parking on somebody else's land.

### **Vale of White Horse**

An order for a minimal diversion of Pusey FP4 around a garden has been confirmed, as has a minor diversion at Pennyhooks Farmhouse at Shrivenham. The order to

stop up a part-width of St. Helen Without FP2 along the Wootton boundary has been rejected, as the claimants could not prove that the width did not exceed the stated width of three metres, the actual width being unknown. It is proposed to divert Drayton FP17 back to the junction with Peep-o'-Day Lane, avoiding the bridleway currently used by lorries. Proposals to divert West Challow FP6 at the railway to avoid climbing over a crash barrier, and at Hale Farm in Kingston Lisle to avoid the level crossing, are ongoing.

The marina at Brandy Island near Lechlade has been granted planning permission, despite considerable local opposition; however, this has come with numerous conditions.

### **West Oxfordshire**

The claim at Wootton has gone to written representations (where both sides put their case in writing without the need for an expensive public inquiry). The extension of Watery Lane, Charlbury has been confirmed as a byway open to all traffic at one end, a restricted byway at the other, and a footpath in the middle; it is hoped to find evidence to upgrade this section. The diversion at Cornbury Lodge has been confirmed after the sole objector withdrew. The diversion at the Countryside Services office at Eynsham has been confirmed; the old route crossed the fence at strange angles. Diversion proposals at Downs Road, Witney for a proposed roundabout, and at Idbury FP4 to connect a cul-de-sac with the network, are ongoing, as is a claim for vehicular rights on the Oxfordshire Way at Stonesfield, made by someone who has since left the district.

## **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, and clear out the rampaging weeds that block paths in summer. 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 start a new Banker's Order. To change an existing order this form should be presented to your own bank branch.

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

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

Please pay to Santander UK plc, 2 Triton Square, Regent's Place, London NW1 3AN, for the credit of the account of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (Sort Code 09-01-52, 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.