OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

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District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey, 23 Hawkswell Gardens, Oxford OX2 7EX (Tel.

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City of Oxford vacant

South Oxfordshire N Moon, The Cottage, Church Path, Stokenchurch, High

Wycombe, Bucks HP14 3TL (Tel. 01494-482494)

Vale of White Horse J Asbridge (left the area April 2014; now vacant)

West Oxfordshire vacant

Scrutineer of Accounts Joyce Dawson

Website address: "www.ofs.org.uk"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work Website or Membership Secretary

Membership Secretary

Walks – specific dates Leader named in programme

Details of footpath problems should be reported directly to Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Access Team 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. This can be done by using the Inter-Active Map on the Countryside Access Team website page under the heading - 'How to report a problem'.

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 or to Jim Parke. 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 Ramblers' Association

1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

After a winter of floods which resulted in the need to change the routes of some walks, in contrast the summer and autumn weather was excellent for walking the paths in Oxfordshire. According to Met Office statistics, 2014 has been the warmest year in Britain since records began.

103 walks were included in the year's programme, the total length of which adds up to 663 miles. Even allowing for some stretches of footpath in the neighbouring counties, this represents the use of nearly 25% of Oxfordshire's Public Rights of Way network. I believe that an enormous improvement to the paths would be made if, on every one of those walks, a member took with him/her a pair of secateurs to clip and snip away any obstructing vegetation at stiles, bridges or gates.

The Society continues its programme in supporting the installation of kissing gates to replace stiles. Two projects are in the course of negotiation and implementation. They are located at Sibford Gower on the d'Arcy Dalton Way and on the Oxfordshire Way in the parish of Garsington. I would welcome suggestions from members where we could make similar improvements to the path network.

The Jack Ibbott Memorial walk took place in June and we were pleased to be joined on it by Jack and Margaret's daughter, Clare. The walk, centred on Wallingford and the Thames Trail, is one included in Jack's booklet 'Oxfordshire Rambles'.

The Committee has seen one change in personnel this year. We were sorry indeed to lose John Asbridge from the Committee earlier this year. John had been a member of the Committee for many years and acted as Footpath Secretary for the Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire, logging and collating footpath problems and sending them on to the County Council's Countryside Access Team. John and Sue were also walk leaders, particularly walks in the Chiltern Hills. Members will have read John and Sue's message in the Society's September newsletter; it is good to note that they have settled in happily in the village of Dersingham in West Norfolk.

I also report with regret that John Trumper, our Society's Vice-President, is resigning. John and Doreen have been members of OFS since 1993. John was Chairman from 2000 to 2003, and in more recent years has acted as our Vice-President – a most valuable contribution appreciated by us all.

The year saw the publication of Oxfordshire County Council's Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 as approved by County Council Cabinet in November. The plan came into effect on January 1st 2015. This document is the second statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the county. It sets out the vision for managing and improving access, mainly on the public rights of way network, for the next ten years. In the draft stage of the Plan the Oxford Fieldpaths Society and Oxfordshire Area Ramblers recommended that there was greater scope for the voluntary organisations which use the path network to work with the Countryside Access Team, particularly by the establishment of Parish Path Wardens. This need has been brought into sharper focus by the very challenging financial climate in which the Countryside Access Team must now operate. It should be noted that the revenue budget for the service has been reduced by an overall 47% for the 4 year period 2010 – 2014. It is good to see that the OFS/Rambler recommendations have been incorporated into Section 2 of the plan 'Statement of Action'. While the full text of the

Management Plan runs to some 68 pages, there is a short ten-page summary document which I would urge members to read. A very interesting section, illustrated with maps, is included in Appendix B, headed 'Key growth areas – Countryside Access development aspirations'. This is a particularly important issue concerning the nine locations in the county where there could be extensive urban expansion in the next ten years. The full document, summary, appendices etc can be found on the Oxfordshire County Council's website, 'Oxfordshire County Council/Rights of Way Management plan'.

No Chairman's annual report would be complete without an expression of my grateful thanks to those members who volunteer to lead walks and, in so doing, fulfil one of the principal objectives of the Society. Also I thank all the members of our Committee who ensure that the Society is run in an effective and efficient manner.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met five times during 2014, the October meeting having been cancelled because of clashes of dates.

We now have 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 Asbridge moved to Norfolk after last year's AGM; we wish him all the best. There are three vacancies for ordinary members on the committee in addition to the vacant District Secretary positions.

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 31st December 2014 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	38
Annual members	256
Hon. Members	5
	299

During the year 10 new members joined, 4 informed us of their intention to resign and 21 did not renew their subscription.

The response to our letter requesting members to Gift Aid their subscription was disappointing. Fewer than half of those who were sent a letter replied. This is an excellent way of increasing our income at no extra expense to you, as we are able to claim back the tax you have paid on the amount of your subscription. If you still have

the letter we would be very pleased to hear from you or you can find a Gift Aid form with the application form on our website (or at the back of this report).

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 Income over Expenditure of £1,388; this was additionally enhanced by gains on Investments of £717 making total revenue increase of £2,105. The accumulated balance now stands at £33,095.

During the year, the Society made a presentation to John Asbridge who, after many years of devoted service on the OFS Committee, moved to the Norfolk.

The value of stocks and shares has shown a steady increase throughout the year; albeit somewhat less than in 2013.

Our thanks are due to Joyce Dawson for her unstinting work as Scrutineer of the Society's Accounts.

In summary, the finances of OFS are in good shape and adequate to fulfil the objectives of the OFS Constitution.

Social Fund

The balance of the social account at 31st December 2014 was £1814.54 which includes £1375.00 for the Dorset holiday. £50.00 has been paid for the deposit for the meal in February 2015. The balance after these liabilities is £489.54 which is an increase of £3.96 on the equivalent balance of £485.58 on 31st December 2013. The profit was made up of £3.40 from the February meal and £0.56 from the holiday to Cornwall. The turnover for the year was £9789.00.

Gift Aid

The number of members signing a Gift Aid Declaration has steadily increased. This is most gratifying and will result in a corresponding 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.

6. PUBLICITY

A key aim of the Executive Committee this year is to increase awareness of the Society to the General Public. As well as being listed on the Society's website, details of the walks are included in the weekly Events Planner section of 'The Oxford Times'. It would assist recruitment if members could introduce friends or relatives to the Society on walks.

To assist with publicity the Society has purchased a display stand and a pull-up advertisement stand. The stand includes the words 'Oxford Fieldpaths Society - Enjoying and Preserving Our Footpaths' – with photographs to show walks in different seasons. The display and pull up stands can be used at exhibitions and fairs across the County.

As one of the UK's oldest walking groups we are looking forward to maintaining a strong society. In 2016 we will celebrate 90 years of OFS which we look forward to celebrating in force. Our membership currently stands at 299; however, not only the more the merrier but the more people involved in the Society the stronger we will be to fulfill the aims of the Society to protect the footpaths, bridleways and commons in the neighbourhood of Oxford.

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

Another successful year of interesting and varied walking, although 2014 was a year of contrasts: a wet start, a glorious summer and wet again towards the end of the year. Thus some footpaths have been difficult to traverse, however leaders, ever inventive, rerouted walks so that most walks went ahead even if the mileage and route were different from the programme. During the year there were 109 walks and many thanks must go to all the leaders who give up their time to design, and check the walks prior to the date in the programme, which give so much pleasure to all members. The current programme which runs into 2015 is smaller than previous years because a number of faithful leaders were unable to take on the commitment of leading, so I would ask that any member who would like to lead a walk should contact either the walks co-ordinator or any other leader as help is freely given, and there is a walks leaders pack of guidelines for prospective leaders.

Over the late May Bank Holiday walking the Ridgeway was completed, with varying numbers on each section but there were five who completed the entire 86 miles. In April a group travelled to St Ives for a coastal break at the HF house and walking was along the South West Coastal path dotted with the historical remains of the mining industry. Thanks to Sue Crisp and Alison Broadbridge for organising this trip. Sue also organised a smaller group to walk the Malvern Hills in early September - another hilly break, but the views were worth it: looking west to the Black Mountains and east to the familiar Cotswolds with the Worcester plain in front.

The new format for the walks programme, in booklet form, produced mostly favourable feedback. In the next programme the font size will be slightly increased, making it easier to read, and there may be some space for the odd note or two.

It is recommended to always check the website for changes to the Walks Programme as the Programme is printed several months in advance.

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

The Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group met twice in 2014 as intended.

While, as we had unfortunately come to expect, the maintenance budget for 2014/15 was cut again in comparison to the previous year, two positive steps were also reported. As we had been previously promised, £90,000 was found from the capital budget to replace the dangerous bridge over the River Thame at Drayton St. Leonard which had had to be demolished and during the year a paper to OCC senior management pointing out the risk to which budget cuts exposed the Council

persuaded them of the need to reinstate £22,500 of the money cut. In addition, despite the relatively low spending on rights of way in the County, a survey found that Oxfordshire came second in public satisfaction with rights of way showing that the public appreciates what is done and the small amount of money spent on public rights of way is of particular public relations effect. The officers are therefore hopeful that further cuts can be avoided in order to maintain this level of public satisfaction.

Discussion also took place about the future management of the Ridgeway and Thames Path which is to be split, but with the management of both routes probably continuing to be hosted by OCC, whose area is pivotal to both routes.

Another major topic was the Countryside Access Management Plan intended to supersede the current Rights of Way Improvement Plan with some regretting its more downbeat, recession-conditioned tone compared to the aspirational, if over-optimistic tone of its predecessor.

Whatever the difficulties experienced, however, the Society continues to place great store on these meetings as a forum to exchange ideas and to try to influence public policy and we trust that the County Council will also recognise their value as a means of explaining their position and obtaining feedback from user groups and other interested parties.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Development of the parish path warden network

This year has seen steady progress in the development of the network of Parish Path Wardens throughout the County. At the present time, just under 80% of the county's 320 parishes now have a PPW in place.

The role of a PPW is relatively straightforward – regularly to walk the footpaths in his/her parish, equipped with secateurs to clear overgrown vegetation at stiles, gates or bridges The PPW reports any serious problems directly to the relevant County Field Officer in the Countryside Access Team. Twice a year, a PPW will receive a report back from the Team so that a check can be made whether or not a landowner or farmer has resolved any outstanding issues in his parish. If an issue has been resolved, the PPW informs the County Field Officer accordingly. In this way the PPW acts as the 'eyes' of the Field Officer.

In January 2015 a meeting between PPW local co-ordinators and the County Field Officers was held at the Countryside Access Team's offices at Signal Court, Eynsham. There was a very useful discussion on how the scheme should progress and develop in the future.

This year two workshops have been arranged at Tiddington Village Hall and at East Hanney Memorial Hall. The workshops contain a practical session when the participants accompany the County Field Officer, giving the opportunity to examine some of the typical issues that are met when walking the Public Rights of Way. A further session is planned for Yarnton Village Hall on March 28th.

If any OFS member is interested in becoming a Parish Path Warden, please contact me by email jmh.parke@btinternet.com

Cherwell

The Chiltern Railways dualling of the Bicester line is in progress; there has been a local row about the height of the new bridge at Tubb's Crossing (Bicester FP3). HS2 will affect about six paths in Mixbury, Finmere, Newton Purcell and Godington, including two at Finmere Quarry. The plans for the HS2 paths have been published; these involve minimal diversion and minimum disruption; the recent draft legislation has not changed this. The plans for East-West Railway (from Bicester to Milton Keynes) will involve the diversion of Launton FP12 to stay on the north-west of the line, to join FP11 at a single crossing. The intention is to divert FP21 (which ends halfway along the Poundon road) to a farm access.

Obstructing brambles (over 8ft high) on Bletchingdon FP15 and Launton FP4 have now been cleared. The bridge on Upper Heyford FP6 on the Steeple Aston circular walk has been replaced, after being washed away in recent flooding.

One of the Banbury diversions in the Thorpe Road estate (FP60) has progressed to making the order; the other is still pending. The gates on Hampton Gay FP1 south of Bletchingdon have been replaced and are no longer tied with Gordian knots, but there are more horse-paddocks on this land. The diversion of Piddington FP6 round paddocks at Chilling Place has been confirmed, as has the continued diversion (now until 2019) of Finmere BR7 through the quarry. A modification order has been made for Mixbury FP25 to be routed through the churchyard instead of the rectory drive. A diversion of Horton-cum-Studley FP9, to make the path cross the drive of Whanau Farm near the road, is in progress. Finally, a claim has been made for a dead-end path along the river eastwards from The Baulk (RB7).

Oxford City

2014 has been a year of little progress with public path issues in the City, but development pressures have impinged on the network in a number of places.

It emerged that plans to create a safe crossing of the A40 Northern Bypass at Stoke Place to link Oxford BR56 and FP57 to connect the new development at Barton Park to Old Headington and Cuckoo Lane, where one currently has to run the gauntlet of fast traffic to use a gap in the central reservation crash-barriers, have been dropped due to opposition to a bridge on aesthetic and cost grounds and to traffic lights which might aggravate traffic congestion on the A40. Local concern that such a crossing is necessary to avoid Barton Park becoming isolated, to encourage future residents to walk and cycle and to improve pedestrian access to the surrounding countryside has led to the setting up of an ad hoc committee of interested groups to fight for a crossing which OFS has been invited to join. In addition to the bypass crossing issue: this footpath link is also affected by proposals in the latest plans to divert FP57 alongside estate roads instead of leaving a direct path between the houses and this is something we also need to fight in order to retain a distinct through-route segregated from traffic.

Another development issue has been the proposed development of East Minchery Allotments, in preparation for which we have received a consultation for the diversion of Littlemore FP8. As FP8, however, runs on the other side of the boundary hedge from the allotments, we have disputed whether such a diversion would be valid or necessary and this has led to ongoing investigations of land ownership in the area.

Following the successful claiming of a network of paths in the Warneford Meadow area and its subsequent successful designation as a town green, a proposal is now

under discussion for the creation of a cycle/community path across it to connect the Cowley Road area to the Churchill Hospital and Headington. While we are not opposed to this in principle, we would wish to minimise the possible urbanising effect this might have on the Meadow and also try to minimise potential conflict between cyclists and walkers and so negotiations are in progress about the routing, surfacing, lighting etc. to try to find the least harmful solution.

On a more positive note, four new urban paths have been added to the City's Definitive Map in the past year at Blackbird Leys, Cowley, Cutteslowe and Sandhills.

South Oxfordshire

For 2014 the highlight in South Oxfordshire has been that, despite the overall tight financial situation in the County and the need for further budget cuts, the County Council has kept its promise to find the £90,000 needed from capital funding to replace the footbridge over the River Thame at Drayton St. Leonard which was found in 2011 to be in a dangerous condition and subsequently demolished. This splendid new bridge, which is painted white as its predecessor had apparently once been and is said to be of durable materials and to give less water resistance during flooding, was built and opened by the local county councillor in August and has since been well used by local people despite one farmer promptly ploughing up (and not reinstating) both paths leading to it from the A329!

Another milestone came at Henton, where a planning application for the redevelopment of a garage gave us the opportunity to pave the way for the reopening of Chinnor FP18 which has been impassably obstructed for nearly half a century. While more work is needed to secure the removal of obstructions further along the path, the diversion order made for the section off the village street when houses were built in 1966 has finally been able to be certified 48 years later and it would be interesting to know whether this delay between the making and certification of completion of a diversion order is a record!

Other positive news in the District has been the dedication of the highly attractive new FP32 on the edge of Henley-on-Thames; the dedication of a new woodland path (Great Milton FP23) to replace a redundant section of road which has been stopped up after it had been illegally used for some years as a factory yard (the connecting path from the A329 to Great Haseley FP17 across the car park has also been dedicated) and the agreement to create a new footpath linking to the Phoenix Trail on the edge of Thame as part of the diversion of the cul-de-sac Thame FP13 through a new industrial site (now confirmed). Other diversion orders have been confirmed, inter alia, for Ewelme FPs 22 & 38 (to legalise the long-standing fenced unofficial diversion round the perimeter of the RAF Benson Married Quarters originally created as an emergency measure during the IRA bombing campaign) and Goring Heath FP30 round a woodland industrial site.

The proposed diversion of Sydenham BR7 at Sydenham Grange Farm has been rejected by the County Council following disagreements as to its route; and others for Goring Heath FP18a, Highmoor FP5, Tetsworth FPs 51 & 52 (currently separated by a fiendish pair of barbed wire fences two feet apart, which caused rerouting of the Secretary's anniversary walk) and various paths in and around Didcot are at various stages of progress.

Some successes have, however, included the removal of obstructions and general improvement to Tetsworth FP47, part of the Oxfordshire Way north of Tetsworth, the

replacement of bad stiles with gates on Watlington FP5a and the clearance of scrub obstructing Waterstock FP12 within the M40 curtilage at Junction 8; but despite all the good work, the backlog on the County Council's caseload remains virtually static and if anything, is slightly increasing.

Vale of White Horse

The path over the railway at Moor Mill Farm north of Uffington (FP4), which has been closed since August 2013, is now the subject of a proposed diversion for a new bridge. The County Council is minded to refuse another extension to the closure unless Network Rail can give a completion date for the bridge. We are still waiting for Vale of White Horse Council to make a diversion order for the new bridge by the Tandem at Kennington.

Current applications include the addition of a bridleway between Duxford and Great Pine Break, a variation to the line of Drayton FP24 and extending it to join up with Abingdon FP3 as well as a path along Coffin Way, Sparsholt, which is obstructed by a tennis court. The application to upgrade Blewbury FP19 to a bridleway, and add a new bridleway has been rejected, but the application for footpaths in the same area has been accepted, and an order will follow in due course. A path has been claimed from the former Thatched Tavern pub in Appleton to the back of the church, and claims have been made for bridleways on the former AERE site at Harwell for bridleways connecting the site to the byway to the Ridgeway (Chilton BY5). Also at Harwell by the Rowstock cross-roads, Harwell FP17 is to be upgraded to bridleway in order to obtain a safe cycle route to the site.

A new path will be provided at Southmoor where a path alongside the bypass is not on the Definitive Map; the developers intend to dedicate this on a route which is partially diverted onto the estate road (the rest of the path – about half of it – will be in open space).

Diversions at Baulking Lake (FPs 5, 6, 13 and 14) and Letcombe Regis FP2 have been confirmed.

West Oxfordshire

The landowner at Little Rollright has proposed diversions of FP7 and FP15 away from the house. The case is complicated by the fact that there is a drafting error on the Definitive Map which creates a gap in FP15 alongside the manor, leaving no connection between the church and FP7 (d'Arcy Dalton Way); also FP7 appears to go up a new retaining wall and through a greenhouse. A proposed diversion at North Leigh FP26 approaching the church is afflicted by a similar problem. The proposed diversion at Idbury FP4 is also complicated by the fact that somebody once used the dead-end path to reach the village street. An order has been made to put Hanborough FP5 back onto its original line over the former gravel diggings. A diversion of BR11at Hobbshole Farm, Sandford St. Martin means that the kink through the farm (formerly dilapidated, now rebuilt at colossal expense) is straightened out. A claimed footpath by Burford Fire Station has been dedicated (FP23).

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

	Membership Secretary, to start a new Banker's should be presented to your own bank branch.
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