

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

President Sir Hugo Brunner, 26 Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SE (Tel 01865-554821)

Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2014-2015

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District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey, 23 Hawkswell Gardens, Oxford OX2 7EX (Tel. 01865-514082)

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 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	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

The weather this year has been markedly variable, with a dry Spring followed by a generally cool and wet summer and a dry autumn. At the time of writing this report we are experiencing an exceptionally mild but wet Winter but accompanied by severe repeated flooding in north-west England.

I am pleased to report that the Society continues its programme of supporting the installation of gates to replace stiles. Three projects reached completion during the year: the first, at Chadlington where the Wychwood Project has implemented major improvements to footpaths in the area creating a three mile circular stile-free walk which connects with the Wychwood Way. Six gates have replaced stiles, installed by a volunteer labour force provided by the Cotswold Conservation Board. The Society has donated the sum of £600, which covers the cost of two of the metal gates. To mark the occasion, an additional May walk starting from Chadlington was included in the summer programme. The walk included a little ceremony in which we nailed plaques on both gates which the Society has funded. The second project funded the purchase of a wooden kissing-gate located on the d'Arcy Dalton Way at the boundary with Lyneham Golf course. This too, was installed by the Cotswold Wardens. The final project saw the contribution of £1000 towards the purchase and installation of 4 gates in Garsington on the Oxford Green Belt Way. A potential project earmarked for 2016 is to provide gates on the Oxfordshire Way in the village of Waterstock.

The third Jack Ibbott Memorial walk took place in May and we were pleased to be joined by Jack and Margaret's elder daughter, Frances. The walk, led by Margaret Jones, started from Dorchester-on-Thames, and proceeded from Day's Lock to Shillingford along the Thames Path.

We are sorry to see the departure of Brian Colley from the Society as he is moving to Trowbridge to live nearer to his daughter. Brian joined the OFS in 1986 and became a member of the Committee in 1995. During the period 1996 to 2003 he was Walks Organiser, leading many walks in Oxfordshire as well as organising the Society's Annual Outings with Lew Gammon. Brian introduced evening walks in the summer and Sunday walks into the Walks programme. We all wish him well for the future.

Next year the Society will celebrate its 90th birthday. To mark this occasion the Committee has agreed to hold a Society dinner on Friday June 17th at the Oxford Golf Course. I do hope very much that as many members will come to this important celebration. We have written to the BBC asking the Corporation to consider including an OFS walk in Clare Balding's 2016 series of programmes 'Rambles'. The suggested walk is along a section of the d'Arcy Dalton Way from Longcot to Waylands Smithy. We have also submitted a proposal to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Scheme to honour Col. Wytton Perowne d'Arcy Dalton who can truly be regarded as the champion and defender of Oxfordshire Public Rights of Way. For many years D'Arcy Dalton lived at Wyverns in Great Milton and the Society hopes that a Blue Plaque can be placed there to record his remarkable contribution to the protection of footpaths in the county.

No Chairman's annual report would be complete without an expression of my grateful thanks to our members who volunteer to lead walks and, in so doing, fulfil a principal objective of the Society. I thank the members of your Committee who ensure that the Society is run in an effective and efficient manner. Finally I wish to extend our grateful thanks to Sir Hugo Brunner, our President, during the past three years. It has

been a pleasure to have him walking with us and he has been generous with his time and his unfailing support.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2015.

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.

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 2015 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	37
Annual members	237
Hon. Members	<u>5</u>
	279

During the year 11 new members joined, 10 informed us of their intention to resign and 24 did not renew their subscription.

Despite the efforts of the committee to increase membership our numbers are still declining though the existing membership is very supportive and walks and social events are well attended. The number of Life members is gradually decreasing.

Our best ambassadors for recruitment are you the members. Most of us joined because we were invited on a walk by a friend and found it enjoyable and the company was friendly. Please try to invite along someone you know who you think would enjoy walking in the lovely Oxfordshire countryside.

5. FINANCE

Main Account

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet for 2015 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 £2,452; this was additionally enhanced by gains on Investments of £190 making a total revenue increase of £2,644. The accumulated balance now stands at £35,740.

Over the year, the value of stocks and shares increased more slowly than in the previous year, resulting at least in part from the general low interest rate financial environment.

Grants have been awarded for "Donate-a-Gate" schemes totalling £600 over the year and an increasing number of these are anticipated in the near future.

Gift Aid of £1829, for the 4 years from 2011 to 2014, has been refunded to OFS by HMRC. The number of members signing a Gift Aid Declaration has steadily increased and this is most beneficial to OFS, as it has resulted in a significant amount of tax being recovered from HMRC, thereby reinforcing the Balance Sheet.

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 2015 was £367.84. £50.00 has been paid for the deposit for the meal in June 2016.

The balance ignoring the meal is £417.84 which is a decrease of £71.70 on the equivalent balance of £489.54 on 31st December 2014. The loss was made up of £26.40 from the annual outing, £89.30 from the biannual picnic in August and a profit of £44.00 from the holiday to Dorset. The turnover for the year was £3559.00.

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

In the Society's 90th Anniversary year although respectable numbers arrive for the walks we are always ready to welcome new members. With the view to sustain the Society we need to ask everyone to encourage a friend or neighbour to join us. If you ever considered offering a walk to our programme you are strongly encouraged to do this. You will have the full support of experienced walks leaders if you have any questions. My view is: "the more the merrier" and by walking a greater variety of footpaths we will be out there preserving the paths!

Although the majority of walks go ahead as appear in the printed programme it is recommended to check the website or with the leader for any possible changes before going to a walk. The walks programme needs to be prepared a long time in advance and changes are possible.

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

Recently on a walk, John Eyre showed me a walks programme from the first year he was a member. Over a six month period there were just thirteen walks – one a fortnight and always on a Saturday. How things have changed, over the years the programme has expanded to include walks on Sundays as well as almost any day of the week as well as evening walks in the summer and night walks by the light of the silvery moon. This year we have tramped our way across the footpaths of Oxfordshire and beyond as there were 105 walks covering 644 miles, making an average length of 6.13 and a range of 3 – 11 miles. We began the year walking in muddy conditions and ended it in the same way. In between the spring and summer were mixed with some glorious sunny days and others overcast.

Compiling the walks programme so that there is a variety of circular and linear walks, and balancing the length so that each week there is a choice for everyone, has become more difficult and the responsibility for leading has fallen on fewer and fewer leaders. It is unfair that those most generous leaders contribute extra walks so that the programme does not have gaps. So I would urge all OFS members who have a favourite walk or something they do regularly as a 'constitutional' to contact me and consider becoming a leader and telling members on the day why it is a special walk for you. There are plenty of members who would 'buddy' and help recce the walk as well as coming on the day to give moral support. There is a wide variety of walking books to choose something from, including those written by Nick Moon, and many of these are in the public libraries if you don't own them.

In this our 90th birthday year, the D'Arcy Dalton Way is being walked again (eight years since the last time), over the late May and August Bank Holiday weekends. The new Vale Way, designed by the Vale and South Oxfordshire Ramblers is offered for the first Saturday in June, July and August. There are plenty of opportunities for walking this summer always in the good company of OFS members. Please help me to make the following years equally successful by contributing walks for the programme to ensure that OFS remains strong for the next 90 years!

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

While the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group ultimately met twice in 2015 as usual, this was only after the County Council initially brought its future into question by proposing its merger with the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF). While, from the County Council's point of view, this move was logical as the two groups had a similar remit even if the Monitoring Group concentrates on public rights of way whereas OCAF is more generally concerned with public access and landowners appear to prefer to attend OCAF, such a merger was fraught with difficulties which made it undesirable from our point of view. These stem from the statutory basis of local access fora (such as OCAF) within the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2001 which requires members to be selected as individuals and not as representatives of organisations, which limits the number of members, requires a balance in the interests represented etc. In contrast, the Monitoring Group consists of representatives of the different interest groups, which allows for substitution when regular members cannot attend, does not restrict the number of user groups represented and does not stipulate whether attendees are resident in the county or on the electoral roll. A merger might therefore have resulted in some user groups not being represented at all, substitutions not being possible and some members not being eligible. Above all those who did succeed in becoming OCAF members would be there in an individual capacity and not as representatives of the organisations to which they belong. Most of the user groups therefore opposed the move with the result that the Monitoring Group has been retained for the present, but attempts are to be made to improve its usefulness and its future is to remain under review.

Apart from this act of navel-gazing, some discussion took place about the funding of bridge maintenance and replacement with the latter in future to come from capital spending. One particular problem is the closure of Marcham Bridge, the duration of which remains unclear. Discussion also occurred about the simplified system for claiming lost ways proposed in the run-up to Definitive Map closure in 2026, but precise details still remain to be clarified.

Another major discussion resulted from a paper by the Chiltern Society about problems with increased cycling on public rights of way in the Chilterns. These arose from the aggressive or inconsiderate behaviour of some cyclists towards other users and cycle tyres causing erosion damage to some soft surfaces and the fact that some cycling websites were encouraging cycling on footpaths including time trials frequently using unsuitable routes. It emerged that while cycling on footpaths is not, per se, illegal unless local bylaws prohibit it, landowners are free to challenge it by erecting 'No Cycling' signs and so where cycling is causing a problem, asking landowners to erect or agree to the erection of such signs may be a solution. A lack of clarity on maps and amongst cyclists as to where they may or may not ride appears further to exacerbate the issue while cyclists complain that a system which permits them to use historical rights of way intended for horse traffic without reference to their suitability as cycling routes is not fit for purpose. This is, however, something which could only be resolved by legislation and would require much prior discussion to find a workable alternative which had any hope of finding universal acceptance.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Lost Ways

The deadline for claiming paths that may have existed before January 1, 1949 is January 1, 2026. This means that no paths may be claimed from documentary evidence after that date; also that much-used paths within villages which are not yet on the Definitive Map (except those in recently-built estates) will also be lost unless claimed. The chief documents for making such claims are Inclosure Awards, Tithe Awards and canal and railway plans (most of these are in the County Record Office off Cowley Road) supported by old maps if possible. Those interested may contact me by e-mail (dgodfrey929@btinternet.com); please include "lost ways" in the subject.

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, 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 2016 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. In particular there was an opportunity to discuss the introduction of CAMSWeb (Countryside Access Management System Website) which will improve the reporting of footpath problems.

This year two workshops were arranged at Yarnton and Weston-on-the-Green Village Halls. Both workshops include 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.

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, and is due for completion in December; the section north of Oxford Parkway is already operating. HS2 will affect about six paths in Mixbury, Finmere, Newton Purcell and Godington, including two at Finmere Quarry; the plans involve minimal diversion and disruption. The plans for East-West Railway (from Bicester to Milton Keynes) 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; in addition FP4 will be diverted under the railway bridge so that it no longer goes over the embankment.

The Banbury diversions in the Thorpe Road estate are both still pending; both orders have been made, but that for FP58 has had to be re-advertised because the original deadline for objections was before the date of publication. The diversion of Launton FP17 round proposed warehouses has been published.

The modification order for Mixbury FP25 to be routed through the churchyard (which has been signposted for years) instead of the rectory drive has been confirmed, as has the diversion of Horton-cum-Studley FP9, to make the path cross the drive of Whanau Farm near the road. Diversions of Bicester FP6 (the new Tesco's), South Newington FP13 (Paradise Farm), Stoke Lyne FP15 (Horwell Farm) and Ambrosden BR6 (the new bus garage) have been confirmed. There is a proposal to extinguish Bicester FP6 through the old Tesco's and use the existing pavement instead. Claims at Islip (for a path from FP9 to the sports field) and South Newington (along the river from The Baulk) are still being processed.

Oxford City

2015 has been another year of little progress with public path issues in the City, but when development pressures have impinged on the network in a number of places.

Following the failure of the City Council to insist on the creation of 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), it has emerged from the plans for the first phase of the development that again no consideration has been given to the interests of walkers wishing to reach the countryside path network from the new development or the new bus crossing of the A40. Walkers wishing to reach Elsfield FP11 towards Elsfield would unnecessarily have to walk a quarter mile along one side of Bayswater Brook to the footbridge on Oxford FP57 and a quarter mile back on the other side of the brook. A footbridge could be provided across the brook at the point where Elsfield FP11 leaves it to head towards Elsfield, thus saving this half-mile detour. We have raised this matter with the City Council and very much hope that this will lead to a more enlightened approach.

We have, however, heard nothing more about the proposed diversion of Littlemore FP8 through new development on East Minchery Allotments and suspect that investigations into land ownership in the area have confirmed our belief that FP8 actually runs within the boundary of the neighbouring school site so that the development should not affect the footpath and no diversion under the Town & Country Planning Act would therefore be justified.

At this year's annual meeting of the Oxford City Rights of Way Forum where representatives of user groups hold discussions with relevant officers from the County and City Councils we presented a paper raising the various obstructions and other problems affecting public rights of way in the vicinity of the Churchill Hospital and Warneford Meadow in the hope that some progress might be made in drawing up a package of diversions and other measures designed to make the network usable. So far, however, nothing concrete has emerged and we sincerely hope that the County Council Field Officer will have something to announce at the 2016 meeting in April.

South Oxfordshire

2015 has been a difficult year for public rights of way in South Oxfordshire as first the County Council's Assistant Field Officer covering South Oxfordshire and the Vale left and shortly afterwards Mark Sumner, the Field Officer (South West) covering the western part of the district and the Vale, also left after successfully applying for a better job with the Ministry of Defence. While the County Council immediately transferred the other Assistant Field Officer, Arthur Mc.Ewan-James to act as cover, and Arthur took to the job so well that he has since been appointed to the post on a permanent basis, the need for him to get to know the area coupled with the lack of at least one AFO for much of the year (and for a time two) and vacancies in the Tasks Team (which performs practical work on the paths) has limited the Council's ability to keep pace with the caseload in a year when rampant summer growth put added strain on resources.

On a more positive note, towards the end of the year work finally started to open two paths at Tiddington successfully added to the Definitive Map several years ago together with removing obstructions to surrounding paths which hinder access to them and it is hoped that this work will be completed in the coming year.

Other positive news in the District has been the dedication by the National Trust of Rotherfield Greys FP60, a new woodland path provided to save walkers on the Chiltern Way Extension having to walk along a dangerous section of road round a blind bend to link between public rights of way at Greys Green. Another dedication due to be completed shortly is for an extension to Goring Heath FP18a alongside the B4526, so that walkers will no longer have to walk along this busy road to link to FP50 in woodland on the other side of the road. This improvement we managed to secure from the Oratory School in exchange for agreeing to the diversion of FP18a round their sports field.

Other diversion orders which have been confirmed, include that of Highmoor FP5 out of a garden to run through a strip of woodland, that of Tetsworth FP51 to follow a field edge instead of running through wooded gardens and across an arable field, that of Didcot FP2 to cross a new railway footbridge built in a slightly different location from its predecessor as well as various diversions of paths within the Great Western Park development where some claimed paths have also been dedicated in accordance with a long-standing agreement with the developers.

Others for Nuffield FP25/Stoke Row FP24 and Tetsworth FP52 are at various stages of progress, while a diversion package designed to resolve a series of long-standing discrepancies between the Definitive Map and paths on the ground at the Oxfordshire Golf Club near Milton Common has recently been put out for consultation.

With both Field Officer posts now being permanently filled again and the formal promotion of Arthur Mc. Ewan-James at the end of the year making the back-filling of his former AFO post possible, we hope 2016 will see a reversion to the status quo, but with the unexpected further cuts at the beginning of 2016, who knows?

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 the subject of a proposed diversion for a new bridge. The path has been reopened because the County Council refused to maintain the closure order without a date for building 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.

The claims for a bridleway between Duxford and Great Pine Break, a footpath from Appleton church to the former Thatched Tavern, a variation to the line of Drayton FP24 and extending it to join up with Abingdon FP3, and a path along Coffin Way, Sparsholt, which is obstructed by a tennis court, are still in progress; the claim at Blenheim Orchard, East Hanney, has been confirmed. The application to upgrade most of Blewbury FP19 to a bridleway, and add a new bridleway has been rejected, order to add a bridleway along Pilgrims' Way, which includes upgrading part of BR19 nearest the A417, has been made. The claims for bridleways on the former AERE site at Harwell connecting the site to the byway to the Ridgeway (Chilton BY5) have been rejected. Also at Harwell by the Rowstock cross-roads, the upgrading of Harwell FP17 to bridleway, in order to obtain a safe cycle route to the site, has been prevented by one of the landowners.

West Oxfordshire

The proposed diversions at Little Rollright, 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), are proceeding; there are objections to both. The proposed diversion at Idbury FP4, complicated by the fact that somebody once used the dead-end path to reach the village street, is still not resolved. There is a proposal to divert Stanton Harcourt BR12 nearer the river instead of crossing the haul road twice. I have again had to object to the diversion of Churchill FP4 at the Chequers, because the order has the same errors as the original. A diversion at North Leigh FP26 approaching the church has been confirmed, as has that of Enstone FP21 to its original route in the first field.

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 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.