

## **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, 2016-2017**

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Mrs J Byrne, 13 Stephen Road, Headington, Oxford. OX3 9AY (Tel 01865-371985)

### **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](http://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

As I gathered my thoughts together to write this report I wondered if it should review the calendar year or that part of it since April when I became Chairman. To begin with I must thank Jim Parke for the huge amount of work he has undertaken on behalf of the Society. I think this is best exemplified by the work involved in persuading the Blue Plaque Board to agree to acknowledge the contribution of Colonel D'Arcy Dalton in maintaining the Rights of Way in Oxfordshire. The plaque installed on the wall of the garden in Great Milton where D'Arcy Dalton lived was unveiled on August 18<sup>th</sup> in the presence of OFS members, the CPRE, Countryside Services, Vale Ramblers and local councillors. After refreshments Jim lead a short walk around the village and at the point of a sudden downpour we were conveniently close to an open sided barn for shelter.

Walking has great health benefits, from general wellbeing, getting fitter, and the companionship which comes from being with likeminded people. I find that listening to and making conversation while walking the topics discussed are wide, from family matters to the state of the countryside and the world in general. I am conscious that some paths are well maintained, reflecting usage and the contribution of Parish Path Wardens, other volunteer groups and the Countryside Services, and that some stiles are easier to get over than others. The replacement of stiles by gates (where the landowner gives permission) greatly increases accessibility to the countryside for the less able. Since the Committee approved the donation of funds for replacement gates in 2009 (the first were installed in Bledlow) a total of 34 have been installed. Plaques have been put onto the gates to indicate that they have been funded by the Society. I trust that we will continue to be generous in assisting Parish Councils in improving footpath accessibility in the county. Parish Councils will have many demands on their funds, and replacement of gates by stiles is unlikely to be high on their list of priorities. As we are a relatively wealthy Society with substantial reserve funds it seems appropriate that we should fulfil our duty as a charity to 'do public good'. Nick Moon is producing a new book on the Oxfordshire Way since the County Countryside Services are no longer maintaining the site on their website. The committee agreed to make a contribution towards the printing costs of the book as well to commit to spend up to £500 to replace stiles with gates where possible as there are stretches on the Oxfordshire Way where there are many stiles in a relatively short distance.

It is with sadness we record the passing of Sheila Carmichael. Sheila had been a member for more than twenty years, she lead walks and was a member of the committee for a period. On a walk in February Michael Angless very sadly collapsed and died and we extend our sympathies to both families. At the next committee meeting it was felt that leaders should be encouraged to brush up on their First Aid skills and Jenny Byrne, who has taken on the Health and Safety brief, organised for a course run by John Dawson and his colleague in October, and thirteen leaders attended. A second course will take place in 2018, so if you lead walks and would like to attend please contact Jenny.

The walks programme continues to provide a variety of options for members and the year 2017 was no exception, we walked all over the county and beyond and it is encouraging that inclement weather does not deter OFS members, this winter has been particularly soggy. New leaders for walks are always welcome to ensure a full programme. This year members of the Society holidayed in Whitby using the services

of HF holidays and thanks go to Alison Broadbridge for organising this, and more importantly to her for the magnificent catering at the AGM. A very enjoyable Skittles night was held at the Red Lion pub in Islip and the trophy was hotly competed for. Some people have been on the winning team two competitions in a row even though it was thought the teams had been assigned randomly.

At a personal level I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their contributions and hard work and the membership as an entirety who support the Society by walking and those who no longer walk as frequently but maintain their interest in our activities.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2017. Elizabeth Adams and Jim Parke have swapped places. We now have four vacancies.

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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	34
Annual members	220
Hon. Members	<u>5</u>
	259

During the year 18 new members joined, 6 informed us of their intention to resign and 22 did not renew their membership.

Though we did recruit more new members than for the last five years, our overall membership is down. The number of Life Members will gradually decrease but this year more people resigned or did not renew their membership than for the last three years.

The Society is doing more work to help restore broken gates and styles, so maintaining local footpaths, and does provide a good number of interesting walks and social events. Do please encourage anyone you know who is interested in the Oxfordshire Countryside to come along and sample what we do.

## **5. FINANCE**

### **Main Account**

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet for 2017 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 deficit of Income over Expenditure of £1,384, an increase from the corresponding 2016 amount of £1,249. This net deficit of Income over Expenditure results from the fact that the main Income component is that from membership subscriptions, as shown in the 2017 Balance Sheet. Comparison with previous years indicates that subscription income is gradually decreasing year on year, while Expenditure tends to increase. OFS holds significant investments (dating back decades), the income (i.e. interest) from which was £830 during 2017, representing 37% of the membership subscription income (main income component), or 25% of the total income. As the interest income increases year on year (2016 amount was £789), this at least partly compensates for the year on year decrease in membership subscription income. If there is a divestment of the investments, an option which OFS is considering, this will raise issues of sustainability in the medium term. The accumulated balance now stands at £38,315, an increase of £1,851 over the 2016 amount of £36,464. Over the year, the value of stocks and shares shows a marginally smaller increase than in the previous year (2016: £1,971, 2017: £1,851), resulting at least partly from interest rate fluctuations.

The above mentioned numbers illustrate the role of the investments in helping to mitigate fluctuations in the margin of income over expenditure resulting in part from declining membership subscription income, allowing OFS to continue awarding grants deemed to enhance accessibility for walkers on Oxfordshire footways. In this context, grants to contribute to the replacement of stiles with kissing gates totalled £1,492.74 in 2017 (including a grant of £500 towards publication of a guide to the Oxfordshire way), out of the annual grants total of £2,323.44). Contributions to selected "Donate a Gate" and related countryside access projects are foreseen to continue in the future.

OFS received an anonymous donation of £100 during September, which is understood to have resulted from an encounter at the Wychwood Fair, where OFS had a stall. This was very much appreciated and a great achievement by the committee members who worked so hard at Wychwood.

OFS members continue to sign Gift Aid Declarations and this is most beneficial to OFS, as it results 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 in the near-term, although there may be issues of sustainability in the longer term.

### **Social Fund**

The balance of the social account at 31st December 2017 was £626.19. This is a decrease of £68.40 on the equivalent figure of £694.59 on 31st December 2016. £321.60 is being held for the trip to Malhamdale. The turnover for the year was £6179.60.

## **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**

The Wychwood Forest Fair in September initially was disappointingly rainy however we soon discovered that as more people were driven into the marquee more people visited the OFS publicity stand; far more than previous years. We had a number of committee members attending the stand and we were all busy speaking to people. So far however no new members were recruited as a result of the Fair.

In February a two-page illustrated article appeared in the Oxford Times monthly magazine - Oxfordshire Limited Edition giving details of the work of D'Arcy Dalton to preserve our footpaths and the Blue Plaque event. The article included details of the OFS website. Maggie Hartford periodically mentions OFS in her Oxford Times articles. We hope that any mention of OFS and our website in the local newspaper will be useful publicity.

The OFS walks continue to appear in the Oxford Times Events section. There are weeks however when the advertisements fail to appear; although we do not know the reason for this we assume this is due to space constraints. The Oxford Times generously allows us to advertise our local events free of charge.

Although respectable numbers arrive for our walks we are always happy to welcome new members. Can we urge you to bring along your friends?

We are always happy for new walks leaders to volunteer favourite walks of any length; there will always be space for an extra walk in our programme. Full support will be given by experienced walks leaders.

Our walks programme is prepared several months ahead of the walks and we would like to recommend that you check the website or with the leaders for any changes before attending a walk.

Thanks to Janice Ure and Jennifer Byrne for their work in designing and producing the fliers which have been distributed to committee members and are now up in libraries and on community notice boards.

## **7. WALKS PROGRAMME**

The year 2017 saw a change of Walks Organiser. In April Liz Adams, on becoming Chairman, handed over the baton to me, Jim Parke. I am grateful for the advice Liz was able to give me on planning the programme. During 2017 there were over 110 walks ranging from mid-week summer evening strolls to longer walks of 10 miles or more at weekends. This enabled continuity of our normal programme of at least two walks per week, on average, throughout the year. OFS walks have taken place in all parts of the County, from the Cotswolds and the Chiltern Hills to the wide-open countryside of the valley of the River Thames.

Currently thirty members are on the list of walk leaders. Inevitably some leaders are not able, for one reason or another, to submit walks for inclusion in the programme. As well as the regular and long-standing leaders, this year sees new members joining the team and agreeing to lead: welcome to Paul and Gill Cotton and Bill Rooker, Brian and Julia Dobson and Ian Vandenburghe. I am most grateful to these

volunteers as it enables the load to be spread more evenly. Help and advice is always on hand to assist any member prepared to come forward, particularly on undertaking the all-important recce.

We are grateful to Alison Broadbridge who organised an excellent walking week attended by thirteen members in Whitby in April.

Looking back on the weather that inevitably plays an important part in the programme, the very early Spring was followed by an indifferent Summer. Then a long dry Autumn was followed by the advent of winter rainfall which turned many of the paths into very muddy tracks.

At the time of writing this report, I am busy with arranging the jigsaw of walks for the Summer 2018 programme. Again I am most grateful to all those members who have submitted walks – both long and short – for all of our members to enjoy.

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

A major topic of this year's Monitoring Group meetings has been the Restructure of OCC services which has seen rights of way work split up with the groundwork being organised by Highways from the area depots and the Definitive Map and other central organisational functions remaining at Speedwell House in central Oxford. The fact that this isolates the Field Officers, who have been renamed and given additional Highways activities, seems unsatisfactory, but they no longer have to share their vans or need to visit central Oxford, thus often making them more flexible and saving them time stuck in traffic and further changes may be made which may enable them to concentrate more on their core functions.

Another important topic was the future of the Oxfordshire Way, one spin-off of which is that CPRE, with financial support from our Society, is to produce a new published guide including circular walks to replace the County Council guide which is out-of-print and which County Council staffing resources prevented from being retained.

The County Council is now dealing with a batch of 32 claims by the Trail Riders' Federation and allied groups to upgrade restricted byways (which are barred to motor vehicles) to byways open to all traffic. About half claim exemption on the grounds of five years of predominant use by motor vehicles before the Act came into force, but no evidence for such use has been provided. No exemption is claimed for the remainder.

## **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](mailto:dgodfrey929@btinternet.com)); please include "lost ways" in the subject. Research into potential lost ways may be done at any time, but claims based on this research should wait until the new legislation (which has a streamlined procedure)

comes into force. This could take some time, as it requires Parliamentary time to enact the scales of fees for appeals.

Much of the research into other documents can be done online, but there is still need to research documents held in the National and Parliamentary Archives.

## **Cherwell**

The Chiltern Railways dualling of the Bicester line is now complete; the works to divert the footpaths are complete except for Wendlebury FP6; there is a proposed diversion of Gosford FP5 north of the new bridge to take the path along the contractors' route rather than the old side tracks. 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 and FP21 to stay on the north-west of the line, to join FP11 at a single crossing. In addition FP4 has now been diverted under the railway bridge so that it no longer goes over the embankment; the order to divert FP4 has been confirmed.

The diversion of Finmere BR4 round the quarry has been extended until 2019. There is local opposition to diversion of Hook Norton BR32 away from the house at Swerford Park, which we are supporting. In the same parish there is an opportunity to sort out the unofficial diversion of the d'Arcy Dalton Way at Gilden Farm on FP1, where the obstructed section of the path is the subject of a redevelopment application.

The diversion of Mixbury FP9 at the old forge, to avoid a house extension, has been confirmed, as has the order to divert Souldern FP11 at Souldern Grounds Farm to a route which avoids the farmyard and gives a better view of the viaduct. Diversions of Stratton Audley FP5 (to the walked line) and Weston-on-the-Green FP22 at the north of the village have also been confirmed; the order to divert Bucknell BR1 through the extended gardens is still pending.

## **Oxford City**

Little progress has been made with public path issues in the City in 2017 as the OCC Field Officer covering the City left in the summer with the result that one Field Officer was temporarily trying to look after the whole of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire Districts as well as the City.

The long-standing problems of paths around the Churchill Hospital and Kassam Stadium being obstructed and illegally diverted continue to receive little attention from the County Council.

As work continues on the Barton Park development, Oxford FPs 57 & 72 through the site require regular monitoring to ensure that they remain passable but apart from FP57 being slightly off-line and FP72 having a broken stile, both were walkable when last checked.

Littlemore FP8 along the boundary of new development on the East Minchery Allotments was cleared of obstructing vegetation following our complaint that it was impassable, but this served to reveal what we had suspected namely that the back garden fences of the new development were encroaching onto the line of FP8 and reducing its walkable width from the previous 2.4 metres to a mere 1.0 metre. Although the path runs within the boundary of the school site so that its subsoil



belongs to the County Council, the County Council claims that it is unable to prove there has been an encroachment and so is unable to take action to have the garden fences set back. This means that the very narrow residual path remains prone to blockage by encroaching vegetation.

The proposed diversion of a path at Windrush Tower, to avoid a proposed car park, will probably now be put on hold until the issue of the cladding has been resolved.

Finally, near Port Meadow, a minor anomaly has been resolved by the downgrading of the eastern ramp to Aristotle Lane Bridge, to which vehicular access had long been obstructed by bollards, from byway to bridleway although the reasons for this meriting officer time when seemingly far more important issues do not remain a mystery!

### **South Oxfordshire**

2017 has been a difficult year for public rights of way in South Oxfordshire as, while we retained two OCC Field Officers looking after the paths, one of the assistant posts was cut and the Tasks Team carrying out field work was below strength.

Despite this, several long-standing problem areas were tackled. After many years of illegal diversions around Lobb Farm, Great Haseley, a diversion package was finally agreed and confirmed which takes the definitive paths out of the farm and an overgrown plantation and provides convenient and direct path lines also legalising the link to the unclassified road from Lobb Farm to the A40 and thus to the path network north of the A40.

Another major diversion package has also finally been agreed for paths across and around the Oxfordshire Golf Club site which had been unsatisfactory ever since the course was built with a different layout from that upon which the original diversions had been based leaving definitive paths leading through lakes and undefined across fairways and golf course rough and at least two non-existent. It is therefore hoped that the requisite orders can now be processed successfully and confirmed so that a usable and findable network can emerge some 25 years after the course was built.

On 2nd January 2018, after many false starts (including the final order giving the grid references as SU instead of SP, thus placing the path somewhere near the Isle of Wight), the orders were also finally confirmed replacing the cul-de-sac FP13 east of Howland Road with a new path linking Howland Road to the Phoenix Trail and a spur towards open country, to which further links might be made if and when development takes place to the east.

We have replied to OCC concerning Network Rail's proposal to close the level crossing at Culham FP1, suggesting alternatives to connect to the network in the direction in which users would actually be intending to go.

This year both our Society has donated a number of gates to replace stiles on the Oxfordshire Way near Waterstock and the Chiltern Society's South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers have used money from TOE2 to replace stiles on the Oxfordshire Way with gates in the Bix and Shirburn areas.

### **Vale of White Horse**

The bridge over the railway at Moor Mill Farm north of Uffington (FP4), has now been built and the resulting diversion has been confirmed. The second version of the diversion order for the new bridge by the Tandem at Kennington has been confirmed

(the first had grid references as SU instead of SP); the diversion for the bridge at Denchworth has also been confirmed.

The claims for a bridleway between Duxford and Great Pine Break, a footpath from Appleton church to the former Thatched Tavern, and a variation to the line of Drayton FP24 and extending it to join up with Abingdon FP3, are still in progress. The order to add a bridleway along Pilgrims' Way, which includes upgrading part of BR19 nearest the A417, has been confirmed.

The order to divert Harwell BR12 to the other side of the new road has been confirmed, as have diversions of Harwell FPs 3 and 7 in the extension of Didcot.

It is proposed to divert Woolstone FP8 at Oxleaze Farm between the buildings, thus resolving a long-standing problem as the definitive line currently goes over them.

### **West Oxfordshire**

The order to divert Stanton Harcourt BR12 nearer the river, instead of crossing the haul road twice, has been confirmed. The diversion of Churchill FP1 out of the semi-derelict farm, where it is obstructed by barns, to the walked line has also been confirmed.

The diversion of Great Tew FP6 at Soho Farms (an eyesore) is still being pursued by the County Council. A planning application to build 28 luxury homes and a Bentley showroom and museum east of the Enstone Airfield site has attracted at least 250 local objections, which we have supported; there are safety issues because access is along the road to Soho Farms, where vehicles are already driven at dangerous speeds.

The diversion of South Leigh FP15 from the house has been confirmed. The diversion order for the Signal Court offices, which the Countryside Service is vacating in March (they are going to Speedwell House), has been made; I have objected because the path is re-routed through a flood plain "for the safety of pedestrians", surely a contradiction in terms. Diversions on Witney FP40 and Charlbury FP6 for development, and Great Rissington BR16, which has been diverted from the Gloucestershire to the Oxfordshire side of the county boundary, have been confirmed. Also confirmed is the major claim for two new paths in Stonesfield and Combe; one is from Stonesfield Ford (at the Evenlode) along the river to Combe FP3 near Lower Westfield Farm; the other is from this path alongside the parish boundary up Bagg's Bottom to the Combe-Stonesfield road.

A planning application to amend the aftercare of part of the City Farm landfill site at Long Hanborough caused a bit of alarm, as the submitted plans seemed to indicate that a new fence was going to be built across the path. The confusion was caused by the use of old plans which showed the path as originally diverted, rather than after it was put back to its original line. The new plan indicates that the fence will be where it is already, roughly alongside and on the correct side of the path.

The d'Arcy Dalton Way at Westwell FP3, between Westwell and Holwell, was waymarked for years off the definitive line, which follows every single one of the old maps in going along the field edge; the walked line was down the middle of the field. This has now been cut off by a new fence between the walked line and the definitive line, in accordance with granted planning permission, forcing walkers to use the latter. What is patently obvious is that this path is the old line of the Westwell-Holwell road,

which was awarded elsewhere by the 1770 enclosure award and appealed against so that the original road was kept; the Davis map of 1791 shows the road on the line of Westwell FP3. At some time between 1791 and the first Ordnance Survey the road seems to have been diverted to its present winding route. The locals are trying to claim the walked route on the basis of (they say) 70 years' use; this will no doubt rumble on till the second coming of Godot.

## **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 and vicious vegetation that block paths in summer. We are also grateful for the work of our colleagues in the Chiltern Society, Open Spaces Society, Cotswold Wardens 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.....

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**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.