

OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

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Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2016-2017

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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 Annual Report is an opportunity to review the year and to acknowledge all the members of the Society who make contributions to its success. The winter of 2018 was punctuated by the repeated visits of 'The Beast from the East' with mild days before and after each visit, however no walks were cancelled through inclement conditions. By the time of last year's AGM in April, spring had arrived, and the fine weather continued through a glorious summer and as walkers we witnessed huge cracks in the fields where the ground had dried so that poles could become firmly wedged. Autumn produced wonderful colours and by the end of the year temperatures were still above average.

During the year the committee were approached for requests for funding. The first was a new book on the Oxfordshire Way being written by Nick Moon, long overdue. The committee agreed to a donation towards the printing costs, and to fund new gates to replace broken or inadequate stiles. Some of these have been identified by Nick and hopefully we will see the book and gates before too long. The second request was from the Cotswold Wardens for funding to assist them in their work transporting equipment to sites of work. The £1000 donation has been used to purchase a trailer and the necessary additions to a vehicle for towing. A more detailed report with photos will be in the Newsletter later this year. We have continued to contribute to new gates and Leafield village will be the next recipient. This is a joint initiative as it requires the Countryside Services to liaise with the land owner, OFS to pay for the gates and in this case the Cotswold Wardens to do the installing. Finally, we will put plaques on the gates to indicate that they were funded by OFS. Needless to say, completion does not occur overnight.

This year saw the passing of three important members of OFS. Margaret Ibbott, was a keen walker, and leader with her husband Jack, and between 1984 and 1992 was the Walks Organiser. With Jack she co-authored a book of Oxfordshire walks in aid of Kennington Overseas Aid.

Alun Jones will be remembered for designing our logo, he was secretary of OFS 1959-67 as well as being a member of CPRE and preparing the maps for the Green Spaces walk. In the 60s and 70s he organised the sponsored 'Save the Countryside' walks which is the basis of the healthy bank balance OFS enjoys and therefore allows us to make donations to improve access to the countryside.

Lewis Gammon was a very engaging and active leader of walks, a committee member for many years. Lew and I organised the 80th anniversary party for OFS at Oriol College, he was stalwart in organising the annual outing, skittles evenings and barn dances. He was a mine of information about local history so chatting to him while walking was never dull.

What is becoming apparent at the committee meetings is the number of plans being submitted for housing to meet the perceived unmet need for the city and the region as a whole. These are scrutinised carefully by the committee to ensure that no footpaths are lost and those diverted are done so without detriment to walkers. David Godfrey and Nick Moon give the committee their views as they have many years of experience. The added uncertainties of the Oxford Cambridge Expressway mean that both as a Society and as individuals we should be aware of planning applications in our own villages and suburbs. The rail project HS2 has less impact on Oxfordshire,

but the planned rail line between Oxford and Cambridge may, like the Expressway, impact villages across the county.

There have been two outings away from Oxford. In May members went to Malhamdale to walk in North Yorkshire, staying at the HF hotel and experiencing good weather for walking; thanks to Lesley Fraser for organising this. In September a small team from the committee: Sue Crisp, Janice Ure, Ann Partridge and Jenny Byrne, organised a day out in Gloucester which was very successful.

I am sure that all members are aware of the General Data Protection Regulations which was enacted during the year. Be assured OFS holds the personal details of members securely for the sole purpose of communicating with them in the form of the Annual Report, the Walks Programme and the Newsletter and for social events. As members you have the right to check what data we hold, and you can ask to have any corrections made. The information is not passed on to a third party. There are more details of our privacy notice on the website.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the hard work of all the walks leaders who design or search out walks in familiar or in new venues, time taken to check that the footpaths are passable, clearing overgrown patches, reporting broken stiles and inadequate bridges, which allows all members to enjoy the countryside. But above all the continuation of the success of the Society depends on a buoyant membership and being out on walks so bring a friend, family member and enjoy our wonderful countryside which is so good for our health and mental wellbeing.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2017. We now have four vacancies.

We have three vacancies for District Secretaries. This involves reporting problems, responding to requests for diversions, and checking possible claims for new paths. Most of the documents for checking claims are in the County Records Office in Cowley. We badly need people to undertake this work; 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 2018 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	34
Annual members	204
Hon. Members	<u>4</u>
	242

During the year 13 new members joined, 9 informed us of their intention to resign and 23 did not renew their membership.

Thank you to all those who have paid their subscription for 2019 by cheque or by Bank Transfer at the beginning of the year but there are still a lot of members who

only pay when they receive a reminder with the March mailing. I would also like to ask that you do not reuse old envelopes or stamps that have not been franked. The Post Office are checking very carefully on these and I have already had to pay £2 each to receive some envelopes with such stamps.

Sadly our numbers have declined again. The membership is good value for money. We arrange an interesting programme of walks and social events and are doing more work to support the local countryside and to keep a check on public footpaths. Do please encourage your friends to come along.

5. FINANCE

Main Account

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet for 2018 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 £199, down from £1,384 in 2017, mainly due to a decrease on grants of approximately £1,300. Subscription income in 2018 was £2,087, down 7% from £2,246 in 2017, continuing a slow decline that has been apparent for several years. A useful financial guiding rule is that subscription income should broadly balance normal operating expenditure (taken to be total expenditure less discretionary grants). The normal operating expenditure in 2018 was £2,393 and for 2017, £2,406, these 2 values being very close, indicating a reasonably stationary expenditure pattern. However the annual decrease in subscription income results in a divergence from this aforementioned guiding rule, but this is compensated for by the dividend and interest income, which increased from £830 in 2017 to £878 in 2018. Thus the investments (which OFS has held for decades) act as a buffer against a decline in subscription income, which is inherently unpredictable but seems to have continued steadily over the past few years. Clearly this is a trend which will have to be monitored closely as it directly influences the sustainability of OFS.

The accumulated balance now stands at £34,352, a decrease of £2,579 over the 2017 amount of £36,931. Over the year, the investments have decreased in value having appreciated in previous years, demonstrating the veracity of the fine-print warnings on investment prospectuses that investment values go down as well as up.

The financial management of the OFS Trustees allows OFS to continue awarding grants deemed to enhance accessibility for walkers on Oxfordshire footways. In this context, Cotswold Wardens were awarded a grant of £1,000 to assist with the purchase of a trailer that will greatly enhance their capability in transporting materials and equipment to often remote locations to implement accessibility improvements. Contributions to selected countryside access enhancement projects such as "Donate a Gate" are foreseen to continue in the future.

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 2018 was £1234.99 with a liability of £975.00 for the Derbyshire Holiday. The balance after deducting the liabilities is £259.99 which is a decrease from the equivalent balance of £304.59 on 31st December 2018. The trip to Yorkshire lost £64.60 and the annual outing made a profit of £20.00. The turnover for the year was £9963.80.

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

Our OFS publicity stand at the 2018 Wychwood Forest Fair at the beginning of September attracted a lot of interest which kept 4 of us busy describing our walks programme, the Society's activities and work done. For our efforts to raise the Society profile we still however recruit very few new members in this way.

The Fair was very well attended, happily this year with lovely weather. It was heartening to see so many people enjoy the Fair especially with the wide variety of stands and exhibitions on offer. My favourite demonstration in a central ring was of draft horses which had been trained to work for forest clearance, their speciality to access and remove felled trees from positions inaccessible to motor vehicles. Despite the horses' large size and strength their training extended to working carefully around healthy trees to avoid unnecessary damage - all very impressive.

Our walks are entered into the Oxford Times Events section and continue to appear sporadically. At the time of writing the Events section has completely disappeared, possibly because of space constraints.

Our best form of publicity is to ask for everyone to bring along friends and relatives to join us on our walks.

As the walks programme is prepared several months in advance it is recommended to check online or with the leader to confirm that the walk will take place. Mostly walks do take place as advertised however last minute changes may be necessary. If you are able to offer a walk, new leaders are always welcome, and if you have any reservations help will be given by experienced walks leaders.

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

For the year 2018 there were over 100 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. Some walks have strayed over the borders of Oxfordshire into Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire.

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 future programmes. I would like to thank Eme Pilgrim, Anne and Clive Jones and John and Joyce Dawson for their contribution to the walks programme over many years. This year has seen Danny Hearn joining the team of walks leaders. However we are

always on the lookout for new walks leaders 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 Lesley Fraser who organised an excellent walking week in Malham Dale in May which was blessed with lovely warm weather. The Annual outing this year was to Gloucester and our thanks go to Jenny Byrne, Sue Crisp, Anne Partridge and Janice Ure for its smooth organisation.

Looking back on the weather that inevitably plays an important part in the programme, we suffered a long and cold winter which, at its end from late February to early March, saw an intensely cold period - the so-called 'Beast from the East'. The suddenly a brief Spring was on us to be followed by one of the hottest summers on record followed by a dry Autumn, before the normal winter rains fell.

At the time of writing this report, I am busy with arranging the jigsaw of walks for the Summer 2019 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 was again the Restructure of OCC services and its impact on the County Council's performance.

The recruitment of Mike Walker, former long-time head of rights of way at Bucks County Council, as Principal Officer Countryside Records led to OCC deciding to review its Statement of Priorities on the processing of definitive map modification orders (claims to add to or otherwise amend the Definitive Map) and to a seeming determination to make greater inroads into the backlog, which has become apparent since the meeting at which this was discussed. This is long overdue and very much to be welcomed.

A discussion also took place at our instigation about the need to ensure that if and when the Oxford & Cambridge Expressway (or any other new roads or road improvements) are built, proper provision is made for public rights of way leading to or across the routes concerned in order to avoid a repetition of what happened with the A34 where paths lead onto the hard shoulder and sometimes cross the dual-carriageway with or without staggered crash-barriers on the central reservation, thus effectively severing the path network except for the most adventurous or fool-hardy walkers, who are prepared to make a dash for it and then spend five or ten minutes on the central reservation with traffic whizzing past their noses at 80 m.p.h. waiting for a short gap in which to run for their lives to reach the other side! A general acceptance seemed apparent that what had happened with the A34 was unacceptable, but OCC's view that they had got things right when the Oxford – Bicester railway line was upgraded does not bode well as too few crossings were provided thus causing further severance to the network.

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) may 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. 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.

Housing

Many developments are proposed to meet "Oxford's Unmet Need" and other such "targets". These must be scrutinised (whether or not we oppose them) to ensure that they do not result in severed or unsatisfactory footpaths, and that opportunities are taken to reopen severed rights of way over former airfields etc.

General

The 32 claims for rights to drive motor vehicles have all been refused except Drayton RB7 (over the ford) where the claim also included part of the road, which may as a result be downgraded to restricted byway. There are now 109 claims in the list with an estimated 12-year backlog; this includes the vehicular claims mentioned above.

The route of the Oxford Expressway is still vague, and it is expected that a preferred route will be announced before Christmas.

Cherwell

The Chiltern Railways dualling of the Bicester line is now complete; the diversion of Gosford FP5 north of the new bridge to take the path along the contractors' route rather than the old side tracks has been confirmed. 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, also a footbridge with cycle ramp at Jarvis Lane between Bicester and Launton. The diversions round Finmere and Ardley quarries have been extended to allow more time for restoration because of the reduced amount of landfill. The diversion of Hook Norton BR32 away from the house at Swerford Park has been refused because of local opposition, which we supported. The diversions at Paradise Farm, South Newington, to correct a map error and remove the paths from show-jumping practice areas have been confirmed.

Minor diversions away from houses at Wardington, and Sibford Gower, and round small housing estates at Adderbury and Blackthorn have been confirmed, as have ancient diversion orders at Banbury and Launton avoiding warehouses.

There are proposals for major development (but no Cold War museum) at Upper Heyford which could result in joining up the Avesditch and Portway bridleways and routing Somerton FP13 along the outside instead of it being bisected by the security fence. Three claims have been made in Mixbury by Westbury Parish Council across

the school grounds, to join up a path which is now a cul-de-sac owing to lack of documentation in Mixbury. Proposes diversions on Wigginton FP1 alongside an existing fence, Wroxton FP9 at the mill, and Deddington FP5 to avoid a planned house, are still outstanding.

Two claims have been made for paths in the grounds of the school at Yarnton Manor.

Oxford City

Little progress has been made with public path issues in the City in 2018 as a series of staff changes resulted in Countryside Access being constantly understaffed and no permanent replacement Field Officer being designated although it is hoped this situation will soon be remedied.

During the year Oxford City Council decided to resume exercising the delegated powers to maintain public rights of way which it had previously ceased to exercise when the collapse of an Icelandic bank had caused financial difficulties, but so far it is unclear how much work they are undertaking.

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 does the illegal encroachment by the new development on the site of East Minchery Allotments, but luckily no new major problems have arisen.

At the end of the year plans were published for the West Oxford flood alleviation scheme, which at least propose the retention of the existing public rights of way, albeit on slightly diverted alignments, but we shall be trying to take advantage of this publicly-funded scheme to seek network improvements such as the creation of a public towpath alongside the new waterway.

South Oxfordshire

2018 has been a difficult year for public rights of way in South Oxfordshire as Jon Beale, the OCC Field Officer looking after paths in much of the District, was first deputed to spend much of his time surveying potholes and then suddenly left, so that a replacement had to be appointed and work herself in with the result that the backlog of work increased.

On the positive side, however, the major diversion package 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,) was finally confirmed so that a usable and findable network has been created some 25 years after the course was built.

Further work has also taken place to replace stiles on the Oxfordshire Way with gates with the Chiltern Society's South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers using money from TOE2 to replace nine stiles between Wheatfield and Pyrton and our Society is planning to donate gates to enable further stiles to be replaced around Tiddington, Tetsworth and Waterperry.

After protracted negotiations with OCC and Network Rail, the County Council made an extinguishment order for the railway level-crossing on Culham FP1 although the only alternative route is over a quarter mile longer despite a feasible diversion of a

similar length to the existing path being available under the Thames railway bridge and despite SODC Local Plan proposals for a major housing development in the area which should greatly increase use of the path. The Society is therefore objecting to this extinguishment, as, while there may be legitimate safety concerns about the level-crossing, an extinguishment cannot be justified when a suitable diversion is available.

A series of other less controversial diversions have been agreed and, in some cases, implemented, often after modifications have been made at our instigation to make them more user-friendly. These include Sonning Common FP11, Chinnor FPs 11 & 14, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell FP25, a claimed footpath at Watlington, Long Wittenham FP19, Rotherfield Greys FP1 and Pyrton FP9. A proposed diversion and extinguishment package for Tiddington-with-Albury FPs 19 & 20 has been withdrawn for the time being after we explained why it was unacceptable to users, but alternative proposals are to be expected in due course and we commented on proposals to divert Clifton Hampden FP15 and create new footpaths if gravel workings go ahead near the village which OCC currently opposes.

Vale of White Horse

The diversion of Shrivenham FP6 at Pennyhooks Farm has 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 diversion of Woolstone FP8 at Oxleaze Farm between the buildings has been confirmed, thus resolving a long-standing problem as the old definitive line went over them. The diversion of Longworth FP13 has also been confirmed.

The footpath through the quarry at Bayworth (Sunningwell FP8) is likely to be closed for some time, as the cost of putting steps up the quarry face is likely to exceed £30,000. The path bisects the deer farm, and the owner apparently will not allow a diversion.

The plans for the Flood Alleviation Scheme show a cycleway and pedestrian boardwalk from North Hinksey to South Hinksey; the future status of these (probably permissive) is unclear.

West Oxfordshire

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 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. This has now been withdrawn, and another substituted which removed the need for the diversion and routes the access from the Enstone-Great Tew road, producing an opportunity to link the severed ends of Green Lane; I have proposed a bridleway for this purpose.

A second diversion of Charlbury FP6 at the new community centre has been confirmed. There is also a proposed development at Milton-under-Wychwood which requires a diversion of FP13; a new claim nearby has probably resulted from this.

The diversion of Idbury FP4 has been confirmed by the Secretary of State after the sole objector, whose reason for objection was that the dead-end path continued to the road, failed to put in a claim for the missing section. The claim for a variation of Westwell FP3 down the middle of the field where the waymarked stile was, if it was ever made, does not appear in the current claims list; all the old map evidence is against it.

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 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.

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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.

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