

THE REMARKABLE WALDSTEIN

BY DR. DON ANTHONY

For many years I thought Charles Waldstein was “director of the American School, Athens.” This is how he was listed in the roll of honorary members for de Coubertin’s Sorbonne Congress in 1894.

I pressed the American School in London. Would they please check with Athens? There never was an American School in Athens was the definitive reply of its officials. Stunned, I tried an archaeology link at another school. “Does the name Waldstein mean anything to you?” I asked the British School of Archaeology in London. “Yes, of course,” he answered. “The ex-director of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge. There still is a fellowship in his name, I believe.”

My Cambridge investigation led me to the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, where Waldstein was once director.

I learned that the family had changed its name to Walston after the First World War; that following the Second World War, Waldstein’s son, Lord Walston, had been Minister of Agriculture in Atlee’s government; and that two grandsons were still alive.

Other Cambridge associates led me to one of those grandsons—Oliver Walston, who farms 3,000 acres at Thriplow near Cambridge and broadcasts regularly on the BBC radio worldwide.

I then sent a query letter to Oliver. Did he by chance have any documents? A follow-up phone call to Mrs Walston: “Yes there were letters and photographs!”

Getting warm.

At last came an invitation to visit and discover in the attic (literally) some 20 A4 boxes of letters—neatly filed, running from 1876 to 1925. In addition, a box of year diaries for the same period, a collection of news cuttings, obituaries and photographs.

Finally, an album of photographs from the 1896 Games compiled by a German publisher. Permission was granted

to me to study them and I made two subsequent visits.

One day I asked Oliver if he had ever thought of donating these papers to a Cambridge College? He had not. However, to my great delight, at our next meeting, he said: “Don, I see you are interested in all this for love and so I

have decided to donate all of my grandfather’s papers to the museum you have told me about in Lausanne.”

Off went the letter to the IOC President Samaranch and back came glad acceptance—both in February 1996.

On September 18th 1996, 98 kilos of material arrived in Lausanne. It is now being processed.

The material ranges across archeology, art and Olympic matters, together with political and social matters over this period. All this data will need long digestion, but to

whet the appetite, I offer the following overview of the remarkable Charles Waldstein.

Born in 1856 in the United States, Charles Waldstein graduated at Columbia University, going on to gain a doctorate degree at Heidelberg. In 1880, he was appointed lecturer in the department of Classical Archaeology at Cambridge. He became reader in the same department in 1883. This ran through until 1907.

Simultaneously, he was director of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge from 1883 to 1889. From 1889 to 1893, he served, also as director and visiting professor at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. The year 1894 saw him appointed Fellow of Kings College Cambridge—an appointment which is timeless. A year later, 1895, he gained the title of Slade Professor of Art at Cambridge. This ran through to 1901. It was uniquely restored again from 1904 through 1911.

Until the end of his life, Waldstein was an occasional lecturer. An eminent scholar, he wrote much and was in con-

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stant demand as a lecturer. His archaeological projects were also a feature of his life and included Argos 1904-1911.

Waldstein moved in the highest of social circles, including the Royal families of both Britain and Greece.

One of his major scholarly treatises was titled "The influence of athletics on Greek art," written in 1883 when he was only 27 years old.

It appears that de Coubertin met Waldstein at his farm and estate in Cambridge in 1886. A postcard in the collection now at Lausanne, dated 1924, reminisces about this early visit. De Coubertin was only seven years younger than Waldstein and it is likely that they struck up an affinity. His diary for 1894 suggests him not to have been at the dinner in London which Sir John Astley hosted for de Coubertin on February 7th.

In the 1896 Games, Waldstein competed for the United States. He was also an umpire in cycling and tennis.

Waldstein's diary for this period shows that he was ill in bed for several days and gives apologies for his poor daily entries on the Games. On recovery he was busy bringing de Coubertin and Vikelas to lunch with "The Princes" and discussing future Olympic plans.

Waldstein's collection of letters confirms his ongoing interest in Olympism.

Correspondents included a young Philip Baker, who later as Philip Noel-Baker had taken the name of his wife as a tribute to feminism.

Baker won a silver medal in the 1,500 meters at Antwerp in 1920. He also received the Nobel Peace Laureate (disarmament) in 1959.

There are letters from Lord Desborough (W.H.Grenfell M.P.) first president of the British Olympic Association; Harry Cust, a prominent member of "The Souls," an autocratic "set" which was active in encouraging sport as part of the education and through its members linked the Wenlock Olympian movement to modern Olympism; Ashbee, who ran the "College of Handicraft" in East London before mov-

ing to Chipping Campden, where the "Dover's Olympicks" had been up and running since 1612; and Eugen Sandow, the famous "muscle man," discussing the anatomy of Greek sculpting.

Sandow was also the most generous private benefactor to the 1908 BOA Olympic Games Appeal-1,500 English Pound Sterling; and Brigadier Kentish, chairman of the BOA in the 1920's.

News cuttings that concerned this later period and confirmed by BOA minutes, show Waldstein to have attended BOA annual meetings. Waldstein also proposed that victors should represent themselves in the Olympic Games-and not their own nations. He reinforced his interest in Olympic arts competitions. In 1924 he was chairing the Arts Committee of the Paris Olympic Games.

Waldstein was, for a time, president of the English Speaking Union.

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He expressed his views on the International Red Cross as well as on the League of Nations. In his last years he was engaged in developing a political philosophy called "Aristodemocracy," which, it appears, was to try to ensure that governments should be run by the best brains available. (Not a bad hope!).

In 1899, Waldstein took British Nationality. He was knighted (Sir Charles Waldstein) later. In 1927, he died of pneumonia whilst cruising in the Mediterranean.

Not only was the remarkable Charles Waldstein (Walston) a powerful wheeler-dealer behind the scenes in the organization of the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, but he was a distinctive cultural influence on Pierre de Coubertin throughout the critical years of development of the modern Olympic Movement.

Waldstein's profession made it possible for him to marry both sport and art, and the ancient and modern Olympic ideas.
