



MODERN OLYMPIAN GAMES AT ATHENS — EASTER MONDAY AMUSMENTS OF THE CREW OF H.M.S. "THE KING OF GREECE"

When celebrating the centenary of the modern Olympic Games at the 1996 Annual Conference of the British Society of Sports History, sport historians must not forget that, as far as the modern Olympic Games are concerned, Pierre de Coubertin was only one of several in the 19th century who had had the idea of re-establishing the Olympic Games of Classical Antiquity.

In the run-up to the Olympic Games in Atlanta everyone learns a lot about Coubertin and the Olympic Games in and after 1896. Admittedly every now and then investigations go back as far as the Mycenaens, which is to say to a time when the classical games had not even really started. At international conferences one rarely finds a solid scholarly paper on the games between 776 BC to 394 AD when they

were officially forbidden by the Emperor Theodosius I of Constantinople. In Antiochia, then Syria and now Turkey, Olympic Games were even lingering on till the year 521 AD when stopped by the Emperor Justinus. The town of Antiochia had purchased a license from the governors of Elis/Greece under the Emperor Commodus (161 - 192 AD) to stage Olympic Games for 90 Olympiads, which meant for 360 years. This license expired in the year 521 AD. We do not know how much the Syrians had paid to Elis but as clever businessmen they had apparently wanted to get their money's worth. (1) On the other hand we have never heard that the IOC had paid a penny to Elis in the year 1896, and yet it makes a fortune nowadays which could easily balance the budget of that whole region for centuries. Instead of



THE OLYMPIAN GAMES AT ATHENS IN THE YEAR 1877

A UNIQUE EFFORT
OF
BRITISH NAVAL OFFICERS

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G. DURAND'S REPRESENTATION OF THE OLYMPIAN GAMES AT ATHENS IN THE YEAR 1877, TAKEN FROM THE GRAPHIC, 21 APRIL 1877, P. 369.

paying money the IOC more or less exacts payments from the cities staging its Olympic Games to the disadvantage of the whole community. Sarajevo is only one of the examples in this context.

However, when going through the thematic fields of the Olympic Scientific Congress in Atlanta one does not find a single section on the Olympic Games between the end of the classical period and the start of Coubertin's venture in 1896. Yet there were nearly a dozen Olympic Games which only very few have heard of.

Robert Dover's Olympic Games in the Cotswolds, (2) the Drehberg Olympic Games close to Dessau/Germany, (3) the Ramlösa Olympic Games in Sweden,(4) Dr. William Penny Brookes' Olympian Games in Much Wenlock/England, the four Shropshire Olympian and the six National Olympian Games in England. (5) The four Zappas Olympic Games in Athens/Greece are fairly unknown, (6) and so are the Liverpool Grand Olympic Festivals.(7) The Morpeth Olympic Games in Northumberland/ England (8) which were attended by professionals only have not enjoyed a scholarly treatment so far, and the Lake Palic Olympic Games in former Hungary, now a part of Yugoslavia, are still a mystery to sport historians. (9) All these twelve Olympic Games

occurred before Coubertin appeared on the Olympic scene.

The English heritage of the modern Olympic movement has not been dealt with in any monograph, (10) but it was in this country where most of these modern Olympic Games took root. We must not forget that it was Pierre de Coubertin who came to visit Dr. William Penny Brookes in Much Wenlock in the year 1890 and not vice versa. This was twelve years before Coubertin - unsuccessfully - propagated the idea of staging Olympic Games in 1892, which were not launched, before the year 1896. To Brookes Coubertin was nothing but a French gentleman who had come to England in 1890 to be informed of the state of British athletics.

The only main difference between Coubertin's Olympics and those of his predecessors is the fact that his games were staged on an international level - a thing the ancient Greeks had never dreamt of in their wildest dreams - and that they had become much more successful - after the year 1904. All the efforts to re-establish the Olympic Games had never had in mind to really re-establish them in their antique form. They were and still are nothing but a grand sports spectacle with a contemporary sports programme which has absolutely nothing to do with that of Classical Antiquity, apart from the discus-throw. For various reasons all the "re-establishers" usurp the epitheton ornans "olympic" as a means to serve their different ends. And this especially applies to those modern Olympic

Games of which the centenary is celebrated at the 1996 Annual Conference of the British Society of Sports History this year. The English nation not only had its own national Olympian Games but it even exported Olympian Games - and strangely enough to a country where they had originally come from: to Greece. And this strange venture will be dealt with here: the Olympian Games at Athens in the year 1877.

After having cruised along the Greek coast for several months and after having moored in several harbours such as Bashika Bay, Piraeus, Salamis Bay and Poros Harbour the English frigate "H.M.S. Research" cast anchor off Piraeus on 24 February 1877. It was the officers (numbering 56) who had the idea of staging athletic sports ashore - for the amusement of the crew (numbering 166). (11) They selected a spacious field with a view of the Acropolis and invited the dignitaries of Athens to attend. Posters welcomed the common folk. (12) They had over a month's time to launch this event. On 2 April 1877, on Easter Monday, they hoisted the Union Jack and, with all the modesty becoming true English naval officers, called their spectacle: "The First Olympian Games of the Modern Calendar at Athens." (13) According to a note published in the year 1987 of which the source has not been discovered yet because the author died there was a programme consisting of the following ten events:

SYNOPSIS OF THE 12 MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES ON NATIONAL LEVEL BEFORE THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN ATHENS IN 1896. COPYRIGHT: JOACHIM RÜHL.

Dover's Hill 1896	Drehberg 1896		M. Wenlock 1896		Morpeth 1898		Lake Patric 1914	Atlanta 1996
Dover's Hill 1895	Drehberg 1891		M. Wenlock 1896		Morpeth 1905		Lake Patric 1905	Stock- holm 1912
Dover's Hill 1951	Drehberg 1990		M. Wenlock 1903		Morpeth 1905		Lake Patric 1905	London 1908
Dover's Hill 1928	Drehberg 1889		M. Wenlock 1904		Morpeth 1904		Lake Patric 1904	St. Louis 1904
			M. Wenlock 1903		Morpeth 1903		Lake Patric 1903	
			M. Wenlock 1902		Morpeth 1902		Lake Patric 1902	
			M. Wenlock 1901		Morpeth 1901		Lake Patric 1901	
			M. Wenlock 1900		Morpeth 1900		Lake Patric 1900	Paris 1900
			M. Wenlock 1899		Morpeth 1899		Lake Patric 1899	
			M. Wenlock 1898		Morpeth 1898		Lake Patric 1898	
			M. Wenlock 1897		Morpeth 1897		Lake Patric 1897	
			M. Wenlock 1896		Morpeth 1896		Lake Patric 1896	* Athens 1896
I.		4 →	M. Wenlock 1895		Morpeth 1895	11	Lake Patric 1895	
Robert Dover's "Olympic Games"		"Wen- lock Olympian Games"	M. Wenlock 1894		Morpeth 1894	Athens	Lake Patric 1894	13
			M. Wenlock 1893		Morpeth 1893	"First Olympian	Lake Patric 1893	Couber- tin's
			M. Wenlock 1892		Morpeth 1892		Lake Patric 1892	

1. race over 1 mile
2. race over three miles
3. long jump
4. high jump
5. shot put
6. throwing of sticks
7. boxing
8. wrestling
9. tug-of-war
10. sack-race

The first three of each event were awarded medals and money prizes. The winner of the sack-race, staged for the Greeks, was given a prize milkgoat donated by a rich landowner of the vicinity. This sport is depicted in an illustration of this festival published in *The Graphic* on 21 April of the same year, that is to say only 19 days after. Some other events are also illustrated there, however not all the ten listed above (cf. graph on page). According to a comment on this illustration, difficult to find, because it was printed seven pages before it, this representation "illustrates the manner in which we spent our Easter Monday at Athens, much to the amusement of upwards of 3.000 visitors." (14) This is stated by Lieutenant H.J. Morgan of H.M.S. Research. "The gay scene represented," he says, "is simply a small ship's crew amusing themselves with the appliances we have on board a man-of-war." (15) This

included the masts for the flags and the flags themselves, wooden posts and ropes for the enclosure of the inner field, sacks for the race, jackstays for the tug-of-war and cannonballs ("shots") for the shot put. H.M.S. Research was armed with four guns. (16)

When consulting the log of H.M.S. Research which is preserved in the Public Record Office in Kew we find the following entries on 2 April 1877:

"6 A.M.: Sent a party on shore to rig ground for athletic sports . . .

Arrived Austrian steamer Wien." (17)

After prayers at nine o'clock we read:

"9 A.M.: Paid monthly money to Officers + ships Co... + party ashore preparing ground for athletic sports" (18)

Under "P.M." (no exact time given) we find:

"Gave special and privilege leave to both watches to attend athletic sports." (19)

There were seven on the sick list that day.

The log is an excellent source; it also yields the following details: at 4 a. m. the wind was calm, force zero; the barometer showed 29.88 and the thermometer 65 Fahrenheit. At noon there was a southern breeze, force one; barometer at 29.85 and the thermometer at 78. At 4 p. m. the southern breeze increased to 2, the thermometer sank to 65. At 8 p. m. it was calm again (wind force zero) and the thermometer showed 62 Fahrenheit.

(1612 - 1996)	(1850 - 1996)	M. Wenlock 1891						Morpeth 1891	Games* (1877)	Lake Palic 1891	"Olympic Games"		
		M. Wenlock 1890						Morpeth 1890		Lake Palic 1890			
		M. Wenlock 1889			Athens 1889			Morpeth 1889		Lake Palic 1889	(1896 - 1996)		
		M. Wenlock 1888						Morpeth 1888		Lake Palic 1888			
Dover's Hill 1887		M. Wenlock 1887						Morpeth 1887		Lake Palic 1887			
		M. Wenlock 1886						Morpeth 1886		Lake Palic 1886			
♦ Argument I:		M. Wenlock 1885				7.	8.	9.		Morpeth 1885	Lake Palic 1885		
In 1996 the IOC celebrates the Centenary of its Modern Olympic Games, inaugurated by Coubertin in 1896. It is the object of sport historians to elucidate the complete history of the modern Olympics, for there were 12 Modern Olympic Games in their the "Jeux Olympiques" at a grammar school in Rondeau close to Grenoble from 1832 to 1954 which were entirely confined to its own pupils.		M. Wenlock 1884				"Sappas Olympics"	"Liver-pool"	"Leicester Olympic Festival" (1866)		Morpeth 1884	Lake Palic 1884		
		M. Wenlock 1883		Hadley 1883			pool			Morpeth 1883	Lake Palic 1883		
		M. Wenlock 1882				(1859 - 1889)	Grand Olympic				Morpeth 1882	Lake Palic 1882	
		M. Wenlock 1881									Morpeth 1881	Lake Palic 1881	
		M. Wenlock 1880									Morpeth 1880	Lake Palic 1880	
		M. Wenlock 1879									Morpeth 1879		
		M. Wenlock 1878									Morpeth 1878		
		M. Wenlock 1877				Shrews-bury 1877					Morpeth 1877	Athens 1877	
				M. Wenlock 1876							Morpeth 1876		

Why were the two watches given "special and privilege leave" (20) to attend the sports in the afternoon, one might ask. The reason is fairly simple. From the comment in *The Graphic* we learn that "the sports commenced at 1.30 P. M. and as many trains were run between the Piraeus and Athens as the line would permit, thus pouring on to the course an unceasing flow of Athenians."(21) At 2 p. m. the Greek Monarch, King George I, arrived, "accompanied by the Minister and a large number of English from the British Legation and residents of Athens."(22) The King was received by Captain Hamilton E. G. Earle of H.M.S. *Research* and escorted to the Royal tent. In the illustration we see him represented in front of this tent, the captain standing close by. For the crew the athletic events were common practice, exported to Greece; so it is only stated that "the usual programme for athletic sports was then gone through."(23) We do not have any details, nor the winners' names. However, the sack-race was the highlight of the afternoon's races. As far as the athletic events are concerned, Lieutenant H.J. Morgan even spoke of "the usual monotony of athletic sports" (24) which was broken by "a hornpipe or a nigger melody."(25) By a hornpipe we understand "(music, originally played on a horn or pipe for) a lively dance, usually of a single person (especially associated with the merry-making of sailors)."(26) On the right hand side within the enclosure one actually sees a "nigger" playing the drum, another one with a string instrument, the

band leader and a fourth person playing the pipe. The single dancer is right in the middle. Typical hornpipes of the day and the two best known ones were "My love, she's but a lassie yet", written in B flat major, "light and humorous." (27) This hornpipe is written for the accompaniment of a Scottish fiddle. The other one is "The British Grenadiers" in G major to be sung "in march time." As to the term "nigger" in conjunction with the noun melody, one must not think that this is an early indication of racial discrimination at the Olympic Games; it is just a technical term.

Another event to brake the monotony was "an Aunt Sally" (28) (depicted on the left hand side), which was "a game much in vogue at fairs and races, in which the figure of a woman's head with a pipe in its mouth is set up, and the player, throwing sticks from a certain distance, aims at breaking the pipe." (29) One actually sees two players with sticks aiming at a figure with a hat on and a pipe in its mouth. In order to prevent accidents, there was a canvas barrier erected and fixed by two posts and ropes right behind it. Close to the right one can also make out the front part of the prize milk-goat. On Derby Day in 1862 this event had even been called "a fashionable and athletic sport." (30) As to the woman with a pipe in her mouth, one must not think either that this is an early example of sexual discrimination at the Olympics. Women - similar to Classical Antiquity - had always been excluded from par-

			M. Wenlock 1875			Athens 1875			Morpeth 1875			
						M. Wenlock 1874			Morpeth 1874			
			M. Wenlock 1873						Morpeth 1873			
			M. Wenlock 1872	5.					10.			12.
			M. Wenlock 1871	"Shrop-					"Morpeth			"Palic
fl			M. Wenlock 1870	shire		Athens 1870			Olympic			Olym-
Dover's Hill 1869			M. Wenlock 1869	Olympian					Games"			piads"
Dover's Hill 1868			M. Wenlock 1868	Games"		Welling-ton 1868			(1873 -			(1880 -
Dover's Hill 1867			M. Wenlock 1867	(1860 -		Birming-ham 1867		Liverpool 1867	1958)			1914)
Dover's Hill 1866			M. Wenlock 1866	1864)		London 1866		Llandud-no 1866	Leicester 1866			
Dover's Hill 1865			M. Wenlock 1865					NOA 1865				
Dover's Hill 1864	2.	3.	M. Wenlock 1864	Shrews-bury 1864	6.			Liverpool 1864				
Dover's Hill 1863	"Drehberg	"Ramlösa	M. Wenlock 1863		"National			Liverpool 1863				
Dover's Hill 1862	Olympics"	Olympic	M. Wenlock 1862	M. Wenlock 1862	Olympian			Liverpool 1862				
Dover's Hill 1861	(1776 -	Games"	M. Wenlock 1861	Welling-ton 1861	Games"							
Dover's Hill 1860	1799,	(1834,	M. Wenlock 1860	M. Wenlock 1860	(1866 -							
	1840 -	1836)			1883)							
♦ ♦ Argument II:												
All the modern Olympic Games were genuine Olympic games on national level like the Olympic Games in antiquity. Quite differently from the classical paragon Coubertin decided to stage his Modern Olympic Games on												

Was this the end of the “olympic contacts” between England and Greece, one may ask. Here the answer is a definite “no”. First of all the two Royal households had very close family connections and visited each other quite frequently. Secondly the “father of the English Olympics”, Dr. William Penny Brookes, had never given up his idea of staging an International Olympic Festival in Athens which was even reported in a Greek newspaper in the year 1881. (38) On 20 July 1877 Brookes contacted J. Gennadius, the Greek Charge d’Affaires in London, to induce the Greek King George I to donate a cup for the 5th National Olympian Games to be held in Shrewsbury in 1877. (39) After nineteen days (on 8 August 1877) Gennadius wrote back that everything had been arranged to Brookes’ satisfaction. A cup was purchased and provided with a Greek inscription in which the 5th National Olympian Games in Shrewsbury, staged in August, were called “the modern Olympia of the British” by the Greek Charge d’Affaires. (40) On the occasion itself Brookes when presenting this cup seized the opportunity and proudly proclaimed that “the Monarch of Greece takes a lively interest in our modern Olympian games.” (41) And here one no doubt realizes that the organizers of Olympic Games in the 19th century were as clever as those of today. For his services J. Gennadius was made an honorary member of the Wenlock Olympian Society in November 1880. Pierre de Coubertin had to wait for another eleven years to have the same honour bestowed on him. (42)

When taking a closer look at the synopsis on page one will notice another ephemeral Olympic event in England which has not been mentioned so far: the “Olympic Festival” in Leicester on 24 May 1866. Without going into too much detail, these Olympic Games were unique because they were staged in a very unusual place: on the grounds of the Rutland and Leicestershire Lunatic Asylum. In 1919 its building had been purchased by a benefactor and bequeathed to the University of Leicester for the establishment of a University College, the “Fielding Johnson Building”. (43) However, this is another story which would take too much time and cannot be dealt with here.

*A caveat might possibly be put in against the preliminary results reported in this paper. The diplomatic correspondence of the Royal household in Greece and local newspapers of Athens could not be consulted up to the present day. In addition the archives of the Maritime Museum in Greenwich and the Nautical Magazine may possibly yield further details.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Malalas, 1931, pp. 224, 248, 284-288.
- 2 Cf. Rühl, 1975, 1976, 1985b, 1996a, 1996d.
- 3 Cf. Ebert, 1980, p. 137ff.

- 4 Cf. Svahn, 1984, 1983, pp. 77-105.
- 5 Cf. Rühl, 1985a, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Neumüller, 1985.
- 6 Cf. Kivrogrou, 1981; Decker, 1996, pp. 41-59.
- 7 Cf. Keuser, 1991; Rühl/Keuser, 1992; Rühl, 1996b, 1996c.
- 8 Cf. Moffatt, 1979.
- 9 Cf. Mrkic, 1988, pp. 208-221. Whereas the Lake Palic Olympic Games ended in the year 1914 and the Morpeth Olympic Games as late as 1958, the Robert Dover’s Olympic Games, the Drehberg Olympic Games and the Much Wenlock Olympian Games are still being celebrated today.
- 10 Apart from Don Anthony’s very informative leaflet, 1995.
- 11 Cf. Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 12 Oct. 1876 - 31 Jan. 1877.
- 12 Cf. Glöckle, 1987, p. 102.
- 13 Glöckle, 1987, p. 102. By the way the First Olympic Games in 1896 were also staged on an Easter Monday.
- 14 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 15 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 16 Cf. Log of H.M.S. Research, 1876, insert in log on 20 November 1876.
- 17 Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 2 April 1877.
- 18 Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 2 April 1877.
- 19 Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 2 April 1877.
- 20 Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 2 April 1877.
- 21 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 22 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 23 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 24 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 25 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 26 Cf. Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990, s.v. “hornpipe”.
- 27 Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, s.v. “hornpipe”.
- 28 Cf. The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 29 Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, s.v. “Aunt Sally”.
- 30 Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, s.v. “Aunt Sally”.
- 31 Cf. Meyer, 1988; Bernett, 1988; Pfister, 1996, pp. 21-25.
- 32 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 33 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 34 Cf. Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, 2 April 1877. In addition the Austrian steamer “Wien” had also been in the harbour of Piraeus, but there is no indication that its crew took part - there were no downhill and alpine skiing events in Piraeus, and the Olympic Winter Games had to wait for another 47 years to be staged.
- 35 The Graphic, 21 April 1877, p. 362.
- 36 Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, cf. 24 May 1877.
- 37 Cf. Log of H.M.S. Research, 1877, cf. 3 May 1877.
- 38 Cf. Clio [KLAEW], 13/21 June 1881.
- 39 Cf. Wenlock Olympian Society, Minute Book II, 1877, p. 12.
- 40 Cf. Wenlock Olympian Society, Minute Book II, 1877, p. 15.
- 41 Young 1991, p. 106.
- 42 Cf. Wenlock Olympian Society, Minute Book II, 1877, p.

1; Neumüller, 1985, appendix.
43 Sharlott, 1994, p. 13-16.

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