

OLYMPICS:

HISTORY

The Ancient Games

The Games were originally held on the ancient site at Olympia in Greece, and evolved from the legendary conflicts among the Gods and the religious ceremonies held in their honour. The first firm record dates from 776BC and the Games were numbered at four-yearly intervals from then. At that time there was only one event – the *stade* race, and the winner was Coroibis of Elias. The stade was 192.27m long (just over 210yds) and was reputedly 60 times the length of Hercules's foot. After 13 Olympiads in 724 BC a race of two stades was held – the *diaulus*, and the following Games the 24-stadia *dolichus* – about 2.8 miles – was instituted.

In 708 BC the pentathlon was invented and consisted of a run, standing long jump, throwing the discus and javelin and wrestling. Various other contests were included over the years.

Until 692BC the Games lasted a single day, later increased to 2 days and in 632BC to five days, of which the middle three for actual competition and the others for ceremonial. For the next 6 centuries the fame of the Games spread throughout the world and many famous people visited the site. Victors won a crown of wild olive leaves, but were often richly rewarded by their home cities or states and sometimes became very wealthy. Crowd figures are not really known but archaeologists have estimated 20,000 spectators.

For reasons not fully understood women and slaves were strictly forbidden on pain of death from taking part – although sometimes the high priestesses of certain important Gods and Goddesses were exempt. Also the chariot race prizes were strangely awarded to the winning horses' owner and not the driver so that women could win in that way. If discovered (and some were) they were thrown over the cliffs nearby.

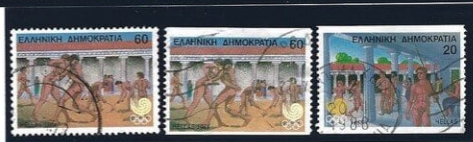
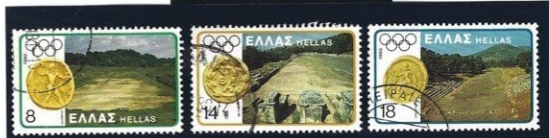
Eventually, the very success of the Games led to their downfall. The importance of winning at Olympia and the reflected glory it bestowed on the winner's birthplace led cities to hire professionals and bribe judges. The dawn of the Christian era also downplayed the importance of the religious ceremonies associated with them and it said that a drunken Emperor Nero was given the winner's crown for the chariot race in AD67 despite the fact that there were no other entrants and he didn't even finish the race.

According to accepted wisdom the Roman Emperor Theodosius I issued a decree prohibiting the Games in AD393. Recent evidence suggests that they may have carried on for another 100 years or so but then the ravages of invaders, earthquakes and flooding virtually obliterated the site at Olympia and the world forgot previous glories.



ΤΟΚΥΟ 1964

ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΦΙΛΟΤΕΛΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΙΑ,
ΠΡΩΤΗ ΗΜΕΡΑ ΚΥΚΛΟΦΟΡΙΑΣ.
FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

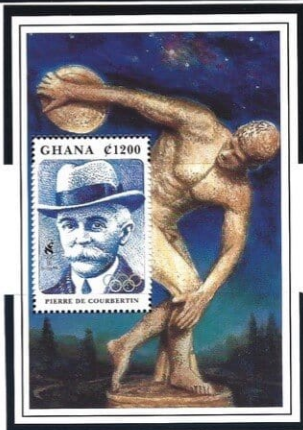


The Modern Games

There was a resurgence of interest in Ancient Greece in the 17th and 18th centuries and references to the games were commonplace in poetry and prose. In Britain the Cotswold Olympic Games were inaugurated in the early 17th century, and in 1850 Dr William Penny Brookes founded the Much Wenlock Olympic Society and many people look to him as the real founder of the modern movement. In Germany there was much interest in the Olympic ideal throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and in Greece itself Major Evangelis Zappas organised a pan-Hellenic festival in 1859 which continued periodically for 30 years.

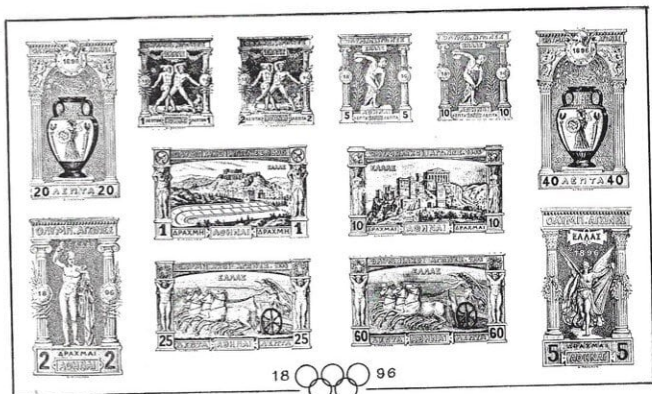
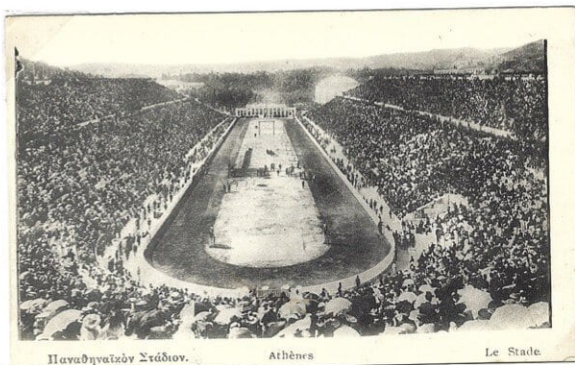
However, the true founder of the movement is acknowledged to be Pierre de Fredi, Baron de Coubertin, of France. He met Brookes in 1889 and was impressed enough to suggest that the Games restart and he propounded his plans in a public lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris in November 1892. In 1893 he met some American University representatives, and he convened an international conference at the Sorbonne in 1894. The outcome was a resolution calling for a competition along the lines of the Ancient Games to be held every four years.

The International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.) was inaugurated under the Presidency of Demetrius Vikelas of Greece, with de Coubertin as Secretary-General.



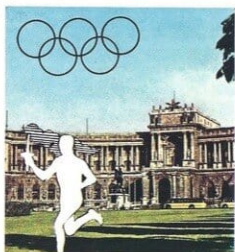
Stamps

The first Olympic stamps were issued on 6 April 1896 in Greece to raise funds for the First Games, and to publicise the occasion. There were twelve stamps in the set, designed by Professor Gillieron, engraved by Eduard Mouchon and printed by the French Government Printing Office on behalf of the Greek Post Office. Because Greece was still using the Julian calendar, the cancelling postmark was dated 25 March 1896. The first issue of Olympic stamps to use representations of modern sportsmen was that for the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. The First Winter games to stimulate an issue of stamps was Lake Placid in 1932. After the second world war many countries began to produce stamps with an Olympic theme, sometimes to commemorate them but usually to raise funds to send their team.



The Torch & Flame

In the Ancient Games a flame would burn at the altar of the statue of Zeus. The Modern Games opening ceremony is always a spectacular event that builds to a dramatic climax with the lighting of the Olympic Flame. A tradition that was introduced to the Modern Games in Amsterdam in 1928, the flame symbolises the endeavour for perfection and the struggle for victory. It is usual for one of the host country's sporting heroes to light the flame, the first being Fritz Schilgen in Berlin in 1936. The torch that bears the flame begins its journey – about four weeks before the opening ceremony – in Olympia. It is transported by a series of runners from each country that lies between Greece and the site of the Games, in relays, until it reaches the stadium in time to light the flame at the end of the ceremony. The first winter flame was lit by Eigil Nansen in Oslo in 1952.



Olympia-Fackellauf
durch Österreich



1122

Symbol, Motto and Creed

The five interconnected rings represent the five continents coming together in peace and harmony for the good of sport and the joy of competition.

The motto of the Games is *Citius Altius Fortius* – faster, higher, stronger. This was a latin phrase used by Father Henri Didon of Paris, which was apparently carved over the entrance to his school. De Coubertin noted these words which were used in connection with sporting achievement at the school, and instituted them at the Games in Paris in 1924.

The creed of the Games has been displayed on the scoreboard of every opening ceremony since 1932: *"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well"*. These words are usually attributed to de Coubertin, but as with much of his mythology, they were actually based on words used by Ethelbert Talbot, the Bishop of Central Pennsylvania, in a sermon he gave at St Paul's Cathedral in London on 19 July 1908.



Olympihex, a large international stamp show in conjunction with the Games was held for the first time in 1985 in Lausanne. The first Olympihex to be held during the Olympic Games was in Seoul in 1988. The first Olympihex show to feature Olympic pins was held during the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. In Atlanta the first Olympihex show to include displays of Olympic coins and Olympic memorabilia was held. In Sydney 2000, collectors could find Olympic and sports memorabilia displays, as well as "Daily Phone Cards". In 2004 Olympihex was held in Athens concurrently with the Games.



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OLYMPIHEX
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ESPAÑA 17*5

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 BARCELONA


EXPOSICION FILATELICA

BARCELONA  **29-JULIO-1992**

OLYMPIHEX ATLANTA
19 JULI t/m 3 AUG. 1996

OLYMPIHEX ATLANTA 1996



OLYMPIHEX '96

135 gld

SURINAME



10c 996

Suriname

865 gld

SURINAME



45c 996

Suriname





Bidding

Cities start to bid for the Games up to 10 years in advance, and there is world-wide competition. The I.O.C. is a highly politicised body and it tries hard to spread the games across the globe so that the continents get their fair share. The Games are expensive to mount however and the Committee needs to ensure that the successful City has the economic capacity to mount such a large event.

The bidding process itself is a very expensive enterprise and many stamps have been issued to raise the funds for this or to publicise the campaign.



Opening Ceremony

The Games are traditionally opened by a member of the Royal Family, Head of State, or representative of the Government of the Host Country. It is always spectacular and the Host always has the problem of trying to better that of its predecessors. Years of exhaustive planning and rehearsal are required so that the day is perfect for the both the people in the stadium and the hundreds of millions now watching on television world-wide. Even the crowd get involved nowadays – there is usually an 'opening ceremony pack' which contains goodies for the participation.

There is a parade of all the participants, and then a member of the host nation – usually a sporting hero – takes the Olympic Oath – "In the nature of all competitors, I promise that we will take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams", and the finale is the lighting of the flame.

MEMORIES OF LONDON 2012

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games produced some truly remarkable performances in a magnificent display of sporting endeavour and achievement.

Sebastian Coe



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