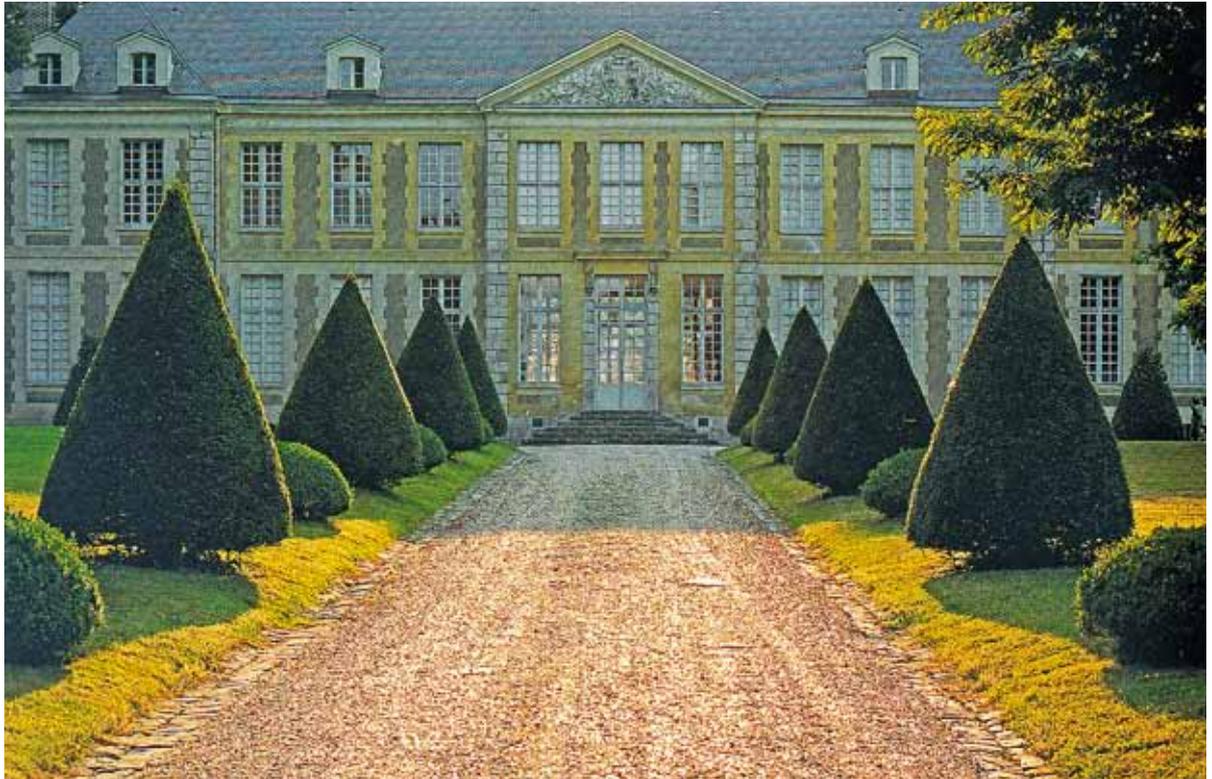


The Coubertin Family – a short history of a noble French family

By Yvan de Navacelle de Coubertin



De Coubertin's castle at Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse near Paris.

Photos: Archives de Coubertin Family

This paper on the Coubertin family has been written for my children and grandchildren and eventually my brothers and sisters and their children and grandchildren (almost 50 people) as a family testimony on Pierre de Coubertin and Yvonne de Coubertin. I have heard a lot about them through my father Christian de Navacelle, who met Pierre quite a few times. I also learned about them, to a lesser extent, through my uncle Geoffroy de Navacelle, my father's younger brother, who turned out to be a great expert on Pierre de Coubertin in spite of hardly having met him. I want to share what I now know and what I have learnt about this great Frenchman, "Uncle Pierre".¹



Yvan de Navacelle de Coubertin He is the head of the Coubertin family and a constant voice for the heritage of Pierre de Coubertin at conferences and exhibition openings. He is a member of both the French and the International Pierre de Coubertin Committees. He has his own collection with objects, books and paintings. During his career he has been Managing Director of Charles Heidsieck champagne and US Representative for Krug champagne.

My quest began with the recollections of my father who often lunched with his grandmother, Marie de Coubertin, who was the sister of Pierre de Coubertin. Pierre and his "darling sister" were very close. "Uncle Maurice de Madre", Marie's son and Pierre's nephew, was close to him too, as well as being close to my father, his mentor.

Soon after the death of Pierre de Coubertin, Maurice wrote two short brochures: one on his public life and the other on his private life. I often met "Uncle Maurice", who had no children and loved my father and his five kids, and we often spoke about Pierre de Coubertin with him.

Finally, I want to mention the last Coubertins: Marie-Marcelle de Coubertin, niece of Pierre and my godmother, whom I often visited in Paris and at Castle Coubertin at Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse near Paris until she died in 1978, and her younger sister Yvonne de Coubertin who was another remarkable family member, very discrete and pioneering – she was a feminist before the word even existed.

Brief history

The aristocratic Coubertin family has had noble affiliations since 1450 and derives from the Île-de-France, near Paris. Around 1470 Pierre Frédy, Chamberlain of the King, made the pilgrimage to St. Jacques de Compostela, the most important Christian pilgrimage at the time, deputising for the Catholic King Louis XI who was too sick and old to go himself.



Nicolas de Coubertin (1718-1794), Colonel at the War of Fontenay 1745.

Far left: François Frédy, Seigneur de Coubertin (1668-1742), Lieutenant of the Royal fleet of the King of France.

Baron de Coubertin became first hereditary baron in 1822 (letters of King Louis XVIII, 2nd April 1822: archives of Versailles; private fund 66J). In addition, the Coubertin family did noble alliances through the centuries with d'Artagnan, Cyrano de Bergerac, Montesquiou-Fezensac, Beauvau, La Rochefoucauld, Pardieu, Bertier de Sauvigny, Hocquart de Turtot, Crisenoy, Madre, Navacelle and many others.



The King, in gratitude and for good and loyal services, ennobled Pierre Frédy in 1477 and allowed the usage of a coat of arms depicting nine scallops (of the Royal Order of Saint Michael, founded by Louis XI). The relevant document, written in Latin on parchment and with the wax seal of Louis XI was preserved at Castle Coubertin until 1970, before being filed with the family archives in Versailles (private fund No 66J).

Hundred years later his grandson Jean-François Frédy bought the land and title of Coubertin at Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse. From father to son, the family lived there until 1978, when Marie-Marcelle de Coubertin died. My aunt was the last person to bear the name of her ancestors (how sad that the last two World Wars had caused the death of five male Coubertin descendents) and she gave me 27 hectares of land at Castle Coubertin and I took her name in 1988 together.

Despite its members being loyal servants of the French State and brilliant military officers in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Coubertin family only received its noble title in the 19th century. Julien Bonaventure Frédy,

The four most prestigious ancestors

François Frédy, Lord de Coubertin (1668-1742), Lieutenant des Vaisseaux of the King, Knight of the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis. The illustration shows the Battle of the Hudson Bay in North America in 1698 against the English Army to free America. He married Marie Morel de Cyrano, family of Cyrano de Bergerac and daughter of Marie d'Anes (family dating from the 9th century) and Pierre Morel, parliamentary advisor to the King in Paris. He seems to have lived in a very high life style in the Castle of Coubertin, which most probably had been built by his father and himself on the site of a smaller home.

Nicolas de Coubertin (1718-1794), Colonel in the Battle of Fontenoy, 1745 in Flanders. He participated in the Siege of Namur and was made a Knight of the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis for his exploits in 1757. He served 41 years in the French Army for King Louis XV and King Louis XVI. He died in Castle Coubertin shortly after

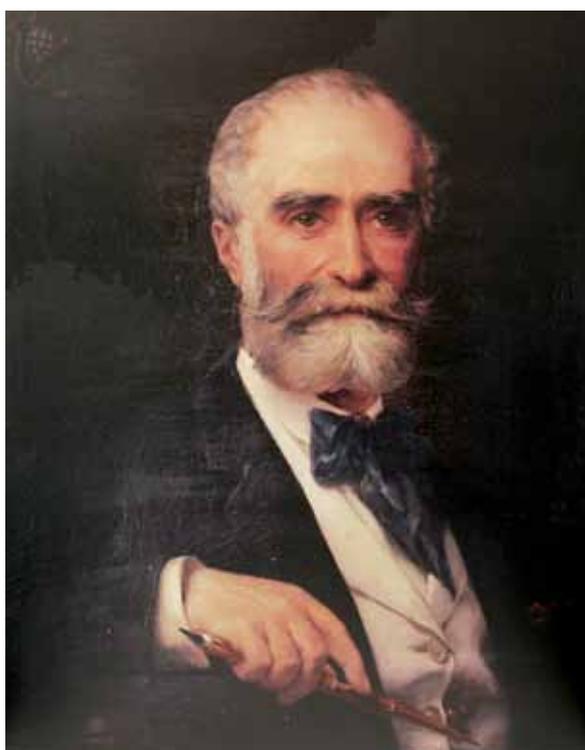


Julien Bonaventure Baron de Coubertin (1788 - 1871), Royal Diplomat in Germany and Brazil.

his brother Guy, who died under the guillotine during the French Revolution and whose name can be seen as "former noble" at the Conciergerie in Paris, on the list of the aristocrats killed at the same time as with Queen Marie-Antoinette.

Julien Bonaventure, 1st Baron of Coubertin (1788-1871), diplomat and military commander in Germany and other places in Europe, acting as a confidential assistant of the Duke of Luxembourg and the Marechal de Lauriston. He was made a Knight of the Legion of Honor by Emperor Napoléon, and Knight of the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis by King Louis XVIII, who authorised his marriage in June 1821 and made him hereditary Baron. He retired under Napoléon III in Castle Coubertin; the Prussians then occupied the castle in 1870 and threw him out. He died the following year in his wife's family house, Castle Pardieu. He was brilliant, intelligent, a good painter and a good musician and violinist who gave concerts in Coubertin. We have his portrait by the painter Isabey. He was the only son of Nicolas de Coubertin and father of the following.

Charles, 2nd Baron of Coubertin (1822-1908), only child of the above, was an excellent artist. Originally painting in the Orientalist style of the 19th century he later turned to academic and religious subjects, probably influenced by his wife. He exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Contemporains of Paris for more than 40 years where he received numerous honors and awards. He was awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the Minister of Fine Arts. Several of his works are held in museums (Museum



Charles Frédy, Baron de Coubertin (1822-1908), painter and father of Pierre de Coubertin.

of Rouen, Fecamp, Laval, Musée d'Orsay in Paris, Vatican Museum, Musée de Coubertin) and churches (Church of the Jesuits, 33 rue de Sèvres, Paris: several large frescoes; Church of the Foreign Missions, 128 rue du Bac, Paris: large painting which was shown in the Grand Palais of Paris at the World Exhibition of 1900; Church of Saint François Xavier, Boulevard des Invalides, Paris; churches in Chevreuse and Etretat; two churches in Rome, etc). The family still owns many of his works. There is a five-page brochure on Charles de Coubertin and the catalogue of his approximately 300 works in 2 volumes that I made for the exhibition "Pierre de Coubertin and the Arts" at the Sorbonne in Paris in 2010.²

The two main ancestors who are still relevant nowadays

Two pioneers who served noble causes and devoted their lives and fortunes to leaving a legacy are still relevant and more alive than ever: Pierre de Coubertin and the granddaughter of the painter Charles de Coubertin, Yvonne de Coubertin. They both deserve much longer description of their lives:

The first, Baron Pierre de Coubertin was already well-known as the founder of the modern Olympic Games when he died. He was well respected by international celebrities like the King of England, the King of Greece, the King of Belgium, and the President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt, who admired his ideas and became his friend. France had not recognised his tremendous work and, even with the international success of the Olympics today, only vaguely remembers him. He is still much more honored, recognised and admired abroad than in France. The fact that he was commercially ruined, having spent all his money for the Olympic ideal, meant that his final years were far from happy. Only recently has his fame spread in France since discovering his canon of work, which includes 35 books, 16,000 pages of manuscripts, and more, that goes way beyond the Olympics.

The second, Yvonne de Coubertin was the niece of Pierre de Coubertin. She suffered through two World Wars and lost many of those she loved. But, very discretely, she also left remarkable legacies, like the Fondation de Coubertin (see also www.coubertin.fr).

I am happy without being proud to have taken and kept alive the name de Coubertin, together with other members of the family.

Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937)

Today there are associations, monuments, street-names, schools and a great many books about Pierre de Coubertin. International experts discuss his heritage in academic conferences. It is not my intention to compete



Charles de Coubertin: *Le Départ des Missionnaires*, 1868 (Oil on Canvas, 400 x 289 cm), Missionaries about to set off for foreign parts are bid farewell. Apart from himself in the centre of the painting, Charles de Coubertin portrayed other members of his family. In the foreground, Marie de Coubertin is protectively holding her 5-year-old brother Pierre by his hand.

© Collection: Chapelle des Missions Étrangères (Rue du Bac) in Paris.

with these academics, but I rather draw attention to several “Olympic” highlights as a family member and (sometimes very personal) supporter of Pierre de Coubertin and Olympism.³

Founder and President of the IOC for nearly 30 years, he had to fight his whole life to recreate the Olympics, which became very successful, important, strong and rich after his death in 1937.

He was bankrupted by the Olympic Games and spent all the money of his extremely wealthy wife. They sold one of the largest art collections in France inherited from his father-in-law: in included more than 250 paintings by artists such as Breughel, Cranach, Ph. de Champaigne, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Rubens, Goya, Boucher, Fragonard, Greuze, Watteau, Van Loo, Oudry, Hubert Robert and Rigault.⁴ Pierre de Coubertin himself never really saw the Olympics become a success. Today, “the Olympic Movement is stronger than ever, and Coubertin Olympic values are still the right thread that guides the IOC in everything it does,” IOC President Thomas Bach wrote to me last October. But the Olympics are only one aspect of his work, as we shall see below.

Pierre de Coubertin: relative failure to success

Coubertin knew neither glory nor true success during this lifetime, facing ruin after working tirelessly to place sport at the service of humanity and peace.⁵ And he received no recognition at all in France, his own country.

To understand why he often encountered indifference and sometimes hostility, Pierre de Coubertin must be placed in the context of his time in France.

Historians know it well, but journalists sometimes forget the heritage of Pierre de Coubertin. For example, a reporter for *The Times* in London wrote an article and often reproduced it during the London Games in 2012 claiming a “new discovery”. According to him, the Games were not invented by the Frenchman Coubertin but by an Englishman in Much Wenlock in 1846. Pierre de Coubertin, of course, met Dr. William P. Brookes, who became his friend. He has studied all the other attempts to revive the Olympic Games, but he was the only one who managed it and managed to make it last; but the costs, the work, the energy spent were unbelievable!

Despite his tenacity and tirelessness, Pierre de Coubertin was unable to convince the authorities of the importance of sport in educating the youth. Sport was a minor discipline and of lesser importance than intellectual disciplines (this is still true nowadays in France). Sport was important and encouraged only in the army.⁶ Thanks to his determination, his intelligence and his hard work, he managed to convince several prominent people of the value of his ideas; they were few, but significant:

– Albert Sorel, academic, diplomat, minister, Coubertin’s Political Sciences teacher and General Secretary of the Senate for 20 years. He became later a witness to Coubertin’s wedding.

Silver pitcher from Tiffany with initials of Theodore Roosevelt; donated to Pierre de Coubertin 1886.



– Jules Simon, twice Minister of Public Instruction, historian and writer, who had always championed sport in education; he became a loyal supporter of Pierre de Coubertin.

– Armand Fallières, future President of the Republic and Minister; with the approval of President Sadi Carnot, Pierre de Coubertin was sent to the USA to represent France at a congress on physical exercise in Boston in 1889.

– Theodore Roosevelt, future President of the United States, became his friend and gave him a silver Tiffany jug with Coubertin's initials engraved on it, during his second trip to the United States. (This is still in the family.)

But Pierre de Coubertin's efforts were not enough and sport remained sidelined, considered of no value except to the army. It is hard to credit what Maurice Barres, the famous politician, writer and academic said: "Sport makes ignorant people, heart-deceased, cripples or brutes".

Pierre de Coubertin: some activities

Pierre de Coubertin had established his reputation as pioneer of sport in France. He became the very active and efficient Secretary-General of the Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports (USFSA). He was appointed during the Jubilee of the Union on 25th November 1892 at the Sorbonne when he was only 29 years old, and concluded his inaugural speech by referring for the first time in public to the "Restoration of the Olympic Games".⁷ Within 30 years, at the Sorbonne, he became the soul of what would become the Founding Congress of the Olympic Movement, in which he proclaimed the official restoration of the Olympic Games. These first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896 in the presence of the King of Greece.⁸ Although the

event was modest in size, it was the first international multi-sport event ever held in a purpose-built stadium holding up to 69,000 spectators.

Coubertin had to struggle to establish the 1900 Games in Paris, encountering many problems –especially with the French Government's lack of resources and support. He was forced to accept that the Games be included in the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris. By an amusing coincidence, his father exhibited a large painting at the same time, which was honored with a special award at the World Exhibition of 1900 in the Grand Palais in Paris.⁹ His father also received the "Legion of Honor" for his artistic work, an honour never granted to his son – although it was vaguely suggested recently.

Coubertin had codified the first Olympic rules and organised almost everything alone. At Paris in 1900 and St. Louis, Missouri in 1904, the Games had been part of World Fairs. The London Games of 1908 had similarly been connected with an international fair. For Stockholm in 1912, he managed to introduce culture and arts to the Olympics; those first Games were quite successful, with over 2,700 participants from 28 countries. The First World War prevented the 1916 Games planned in Berlin. Pierre de Coubertin then moved the IOC to Lausanne in neutral Switzerland to save them.

When the Games were eventually held in Berlin in 1936, it was a milestone in the history of the Olympic Movement. With the grandiose and very expensive Games, Adolf Hitler promoted his Nazi regime. Despite the insistence of the Führer (who proposed sending a special train for Coubertin), he finally refused to attend. These significant Games were the subject of widely different accounts by journalists.¹⁰

In 1913 Coubertin created the Olympic flag with the famous rings – probably as some sort of marketing campaign. The relative successes and challenges continued after the Games in Paris in 1924, but Coubertin

resigned from the IOC in 1925, thinking he had made however a good start for the Olympics, but he will always be known as the founder and became the first Honorary Life President of the IOC.¹¹ He published his *Universal History*. He retired permanently in 1925, disappointed by the lack of support and help from the French.

Pierre de Coubertin died of a heart attack in 1937 at the age of 74.¹² He left two children, both of whom were sickly and died without descendants. His wife survived him until 1963 (living to the age of 101) and was always a great support. She entirely relied after 1937 upon the IOC to continue and maintain the work of her husband (I have letters from her and the IOC proving it).

There is now an International Pierre de Coubertin Committee in Lausanne and a French one in Paris which work with the official support of the IOC. There are also another Pierre de Coubertin Committees in different countries. Although Pierre de Coubertin fought tirelessly to ensure the stability of the Games, facing constant opposition and financial ruin, Switzerland honours him more than France. His heart lies in Olympia in Greece and he is buried in Lausanne, close to the IOC.

Pierre de Coubertin, a great Frenchman

In assessing the legacy of Pierre de Coubertin it is true to say that he was a true pioneer and visionary. The success and importance of the Olympics speak for themselves. His values live on, even though he did not survive long enough to see their success. He undertook the Herculean task not for himself, but for the good of humanity: "Sport reinforces and organises the body, but also the will and spirit, while promoting universality and fair play." An athlete himself – proficient (and in some cases expert) in fencing, equestrianism, cycling, tennis, rowing and winter sports – he created the Modern Pentathlon.

Two anecdotes show how he was open-minded and at the same time avant-garde: firstly, although devoutly Catholic, he married a Protestant. This was very rare in the late 19th century and he could not marry in the church but only in the sacristy.

Secondly, he came from a Royalist family, but became Republican, although he remained very close to his family, especially to his sister Marie.¹³ She was widowed very young and he was a great support to her, even choosing to live less than 300 metres from her (at 10 Bd. Flandrin in Paris, where the IOC was based for more than 25 years). They lunched together regularly and her little son Christian, my father, was often present.

Finally, I should mention his personal motto, one which sums up his character and was on the bookplate in all the books in his library: "Look ahead – Talk frankly – Work strongly". The second important motto chosen for the Games and the IOC goes back to Father Didon: "Citius, Altius, Fortius" (Faster, Higher, Stronger).

He also liked and often used to say, "The key is to participate", quoting the Archbishop of Pennsylvania during the London Games in 1908.¹⁴ And instead of "mens sana in corpore sano" (a healthy mind in a healthy body), he preferred "mens fervida in corpore lacertoso" (a sharp mind in a strong body).

Yvonne de Coubertin (1893–1974)

Less known than her uncle, Yvonne de Coubertin always worked discretely and anonymously, but nevertheless accomplished remarkable things. Among them and still active today is the Fondation de Coubertin, which is more important and alive now than ever. There was a 30 year's age gap between them, but it seems that Yvonne only started admiring her uncle in the 1950s, long after his death, when the Olympics became famous and the real achievements of Pierre became obvious. She discovered a strong link between the two of them: "The mind and the hand", two words that define the foundation and close to "The mind and the body", fundamental words for Pierre de Coubertin.



Yvonne de Coubertin (1893–1974), niece of Pierre de Coubertin and founder of the Fondation de Coubertin at Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse.

The context

Charles de Coubertin the artist had four children: Paul, the eldest, who was given Castle Coubertin on his marriage and was the father of Yvonne. Then Albert, who was given Castle Mirville (by his mother) and died childless in 1913. Then follows Marie, Countess de Madre, my great-grandmother. And finally, Pierre, the

youngest, who received Castle Luttenbach from his wife on their wedding in 1895. The castle had to be sold after the Second World War, because it was too expensive to rebuild.

After a happy childhood spent at the Castle of Coubertin in summer and in Paris in winter, three of Paul's five children, including the two boys, died in the First World War. Their mother was killed in the German bombing of the Saint Gervais church in Paris in 1918 just before the end of the war. At the age of 21, Yvonne enlisted as nurse, together with her elder sister Marie-Marcelle. They both received many medals and decorations by the end of the war.

My godmother Marie-Marcelle took refuge in her painting (studying and receiving a diploma from the École du Louvre). Paul was deeply scarred by the loss of his wife and children and died in Castle Coubertin in 1933, four years before Pierre de Coubertin, who became the last male in the Coubertin line.

The professional life of Yvonne de Coubertin

Yvonne de Coubertin, at the age of 26 began studying languages (including Japanese) at the Sorbonne. There she met the brilliant Catholic priest Wiesnegg, an engineer at the Polytechnic School in Paris who became a Bishop. He just had created the Association Fenelon, the first female student house at that time. Yvonne recognised the need to support women's studies and eventually became the head of the association. By 1922, the Association Fenelon (which still exists as part of the Fondation de Coubertin) had three houses for female students and was still the only one of its kind in Paris. Yvonne de Coubertin had bought these houses herself, without telling anybody, and they housed more than 150 female students.

Yvonne was a feminist and decided to continue as chairwomen of the Association to help women, granting scholarships, organising conferences and giving all kind of additional help to the female students. At the end of 1922, the Association was recognised as an association of public utility by the government. She then opened the first restaurant for female students in Paris with a library above it. In 1925, she opened a country house – again financed through private funds – for girls who had nowhere to go in the summer holidays. In the parish of St. Etienne du Mont in the Quartier Latin of Paris (site of the Association and where all the students stayed), she created a nursery for children from 2 to 6 years old whose mothers were working.

In 1930, she built a new building for female students, working with a young architect and the famous decorator Ruhlmann for the 135 rooms in the heart of Paris (Montagne Ste. G n vieve, 53 rue

Lhomond, Paris 5th). In 1934, she created an orphanage in the countryside for girls. All of this was achieved anonymously and with her own money.

During Second World War many of these sites were occupied and sometimes damaged by the Germans or the Americans. She rebuilt everything that could be fixed. The student restaurants, by then for boys and girls, she gave to the government. She did the same thing for the nursery and it became the first one ever in Paris. Meanwhile and around 1950 she developed a special programmes for the Compagnons du Devoir (companions of duty) in the estate of Castle Coubertin that she shared with her elder sister.

Castle Coubertin is 25 km from Paris in the Chevreuse valley just 500 metres away from the Metro-RER station. The estate includes a charming 17th century castle with a garden of approximately 30 hectares and a farm of around 60 hectares, the latter having been in the family's possession since 1577. Yvonne de Coubertin had met Jean Bernard in 1949. They had much in common; both considered that manual labourers were indispensable, insufficiently respected and should be offered the opportunity to develop their intellectual and physical potential together. They first created a workshop for carpenters in the far corner of the garden and offered study courses in the mornings. Then they built a lodging for the Companions in the part of the old farm. The first entrants to Fondation de Coubertin were stonemasons. Other workshops were added over the time and an entire organisation was established in the 1960s (see also www.coubertin.fr). Finally, in 1973, the private foundation was officially recognised by the government.

Yvonne de Coubertin died in 1974. Her sister Marie-Marcelle lived in the castle until her death in 1978. I went there often. My father was her executor and split the furniture and what was left in the castle with Jean Bernard, who chaired the foundation from 1980 until his death, when my twin brother Gilles de Navacelle de Coubertin took over. He retired in the age of 70 in 2013.

The mission of Yvonne de Coubertin was to upgrade the importance of manual labour and maintain a balance between intellectual and manual tasks: "the spirit and the hand" – close to the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin. In the old vegetable garden, a "bronze garden" was installed and featured many contemporary sculptures. This allowed the foundation in 1985 to appoint a curator of the collections in the castle and call itself "Mus e de France". I must, finally, mention the important library which had existed in Castle Coubertin for centuries.

This is a little summary of the work of the second most important person in the Coubertin family – a very private person but nevertheless as remarkable as Pierre de Coubertin.¹⁵ ■

- 1 In 1937 Pierre de Coubertin died as last male descendant. My father was still single and had just taken over the little castle in Anjou Souvigne that his family owned since 1817 and his parents wanted to sell. It was his uncle Maurice de Madre, nephew of Pierre de Coubertin and very close friend, who bought it back for my father. In addition, the family had already taken over the name of de Navacelle from an uncle on the marriage of his mother Isaure Madre (sister of Maurice de Madre and daughter of Marie de Coubertin) in 1906. The name change to de Navacelle still bothered his parents. Moreover the Castle Coubertin was bigger than Castle Souvigne that my father had just taken over. A second change of name from de Navacelle to de Coubertin and the acquisition of a second castle in such a little time were a bit too much for a bachelor and my father gave it up. I also think that it is for this reason that 25 years later, Yvonne de Coubertin insisted on offering my father the castle of Mirville (an old family property through women, sold by Paul de Coubertin) because he did not buy the Castle of Coubertin before and had 5 children (3 sons). When I asked my father in 1988 50 years later to take the name of Coubertin, he finally agreed. He was totally legitimated to that like all descendants, but now he also felt perfectly legitimated morally! Furthermore in 1978, shortly before Marie-Marcelle de Coubertin died as the last Coubertin, she wrote a letter authorizing her nephews Christian and Geoffroy de Navacelle to take over and protect the 500 year old name de Coubertin. It is one of the responsibilities of the Coubertin family to protect the name. During the Atlanta Games in 1996, for example, Henri Maire wines were selling a fairly ordinary rose wine called Pierre de Coubertin with his portrait on the label and the Olympic flame, indicating the centenary of Olympism (I have a sample of the bottle). Before the family could stop them, they had already sold almost 100,000 bottles and had made a lot of money. My father and his brother Geoffroy de Navacelle de Coubertin with the assistance of the IOC won a trial, whose findings are unequivocal and can serve as jurisprudence for the future. It is easier now that the name is still in use to protect it. In addition, the Fondation de Coubertin takes care of it very well. And finally the IOC is willing to help if necessary.
- 2 For the exhibition see also Müller, N. – Wacker, Ch.: Pierre de Coubertin et les arts / Pierre de Coubertin and the arts (Lausanne 2008). I did a study and compiled an inventory including photographs and location of the almost 300 works of the painter Charles de Coubertin, my great-grandfather. Some artworks are quite remarkable like the Impressionist watercolors from a travel to Oriental countries around the mid 19th century, the fresco of the Pontifical procession in the Vatican Museum in Rome (10 to 3 meters), or the large painting "The Departure of the Missionary" in the beautiful church of the Missions Étrangères, 128 rue du Bac in Paris. This painting was shown and awarded at the Grand Palais in Paris at the World Exhibition of 1900 (during which the first Olympics in France in Paris were held, which were unfortunately a total failure). My catalogue with about 300 artworks was slightly corrected and completed on my request by a curator at the Musée d'Orsay, and for the *Pierre de Coubertin and the Arts* exhibition, organised by Norbert Müller and Christian Wacker in the German Olympic and Sports Museum in Cologne. I was able to get this exhibition to the Sorbonne in Paris in 2008, and it went in several other European cities like Warsaw or Tartu until 2010. I was also able to collect and inherit from my father several memories and objects on this painter: his passports, (in Arabic for his travels to the Middle East between 1845 and 1848; those of Italy for the Vatican) and detailed color studies of his biggest paintings and sketches. I also collected other nice paintings like "Marie and Pierre de Coubertin by their father in Étretat" from 1867 and very interesting oriental watercolors, etc. As I mentioned, many of his works are in museums and churches in Paris. It would be very interesting to organize a retrospective about this painter one day at the Fondation de Coubertin.
- 3 Pierre de Coubertin invented the word Olympism. In his early texts he used it in parentheses. It became common usage. But the French dictionary *The Robert* stated still in 1992, that "this wording has been condemned by the Académie Française in a statement of 5th November 1964".
- 4 The Rothan collection was sold 1890. A second sale was executed by the wife of Pierre de Coubertin in 1958.
- 5 Pierre de Coubertin had inherited quite a bit of money from his own family and his wife, the only child of a very wealthy diplomat and



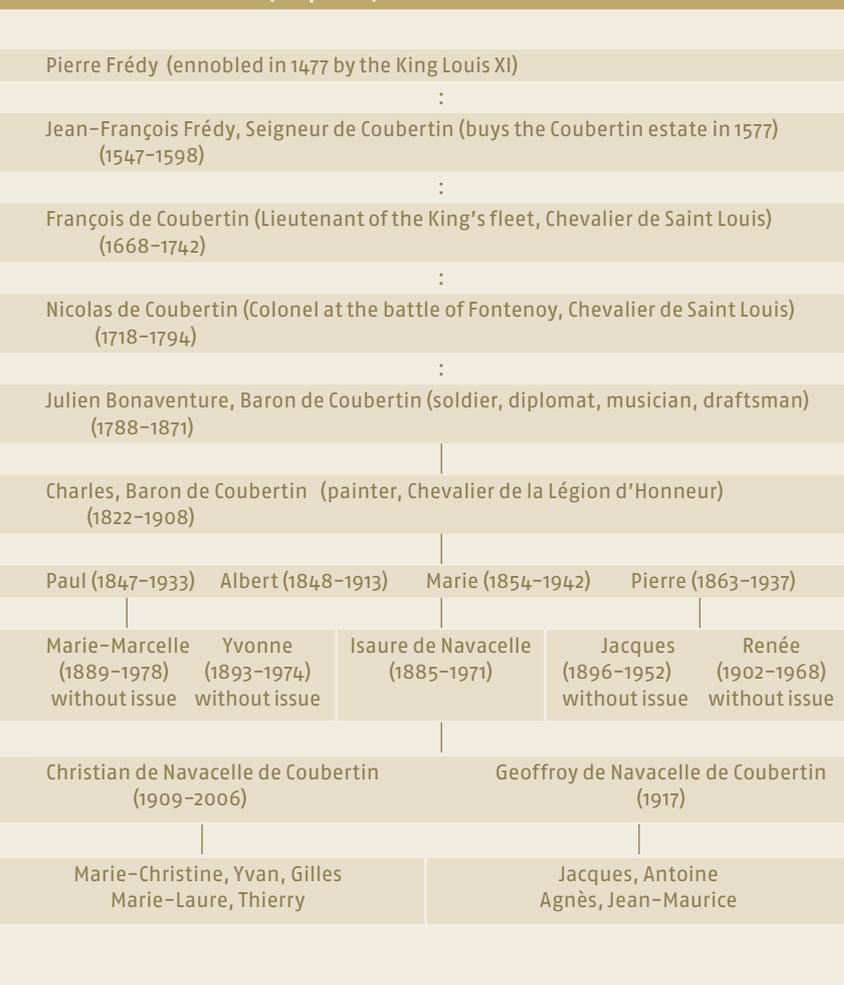
great collector of paintings with a large castle in Alsace and a huge fortune. Everything was spent to restore the Olympic Games and install Olympism as a philosophy. Only Pierre de Coubertin could not enjoy a success when he died and the Games had not reached the size and the importance they have now. And very few people knew or had read his books. That is why his elder brother Paul, the owner of Castle Coubertin, his family and his two nieces did not have a great admiration for his legacy. For them he stayed "the poor uncle Pierre", who never made a cent, spent all his money and all his wife's money. When my mother married my father in 1942, Yvonne de Coubertin asked my mother, who studied at the Sorbonne like her – not very common in those days for women – about Pierre de Coubertin. My mother answered that she should first of all read all of Pierre de Coubertin's books and placed them in the libraries of Thibault-Gibbs (Maurice de Madre's company where my father was working) and of the parish of Petit Clamart near Paris, where my mother was in charge. My aunt Yvonne answered she would do better to focus on something else because this work was not of much interest and nobody would read these books anyhow. Only years later and after the great success of the Olympics in the 1960s, Yvonne de Coubertin, founder of the Fondation de Coubertin became interested in her uncle's work and discovered in his writings the ideas of the "Universities of hand workers" and of "the body and the spirit" or more precisely the motto for the foundation: "L'esprit et la main" (the mind and the hand).

- 6 During the first Games the French medals were often awarded to army officers (see i.e. the equestrians at the Games of Paris 1924). The army has long been a great provider of Olympic participants, not only in France but elsewhere, because that is where most sports were regularly practiced and subsidised. This changed with the development of sports in general and sports especially dedicated to the Olympics.
- 7 The Sorbonne was the place for Pierre de Coubertin where everything happened. In 1892, at the age of 29 he spoke for the first time about the restoration of the Olympic Games. But not many people then understood and believed him. Later this passage was called "manifest" – a rather pompous word for a small moment of a long speech. Nevertheless, Pierre de Coubertin launched in front of the President of the French Republic the establishment of the modern Olympic Games again in the Sorbonne in 1894. The Sorbonne became the place, where all anniversaries and celebrations and most congresses took place. The Sorbonne organised a celebration for the 100th anniversary of his birth in 1964, which I was able to attend. And finally I was able to get the exhibition "Pierre de Coubertin and the arts" to the Sorbonne in 2010. It had been an amusing coincidence, when the wife of the President of Sorbonne told me on the opening day, that she had passed her PhD while she was in the first hostel for girl students in Paris created by Yvonne de Coubertin, the niece of Pierre de Coubertin.
- 8 In the beginning Pierre de Coubertin was against a participation of women. But he cannot be seen as misogynistic. He wrote: "We need laws to protect women, law which puts her in a position to resist and even to escape marital tyranny ... it is legitimate" and "we must fight wherever they occur regulations inept or immoral as those by which the French Civil Code pronounces the perpetual tutelage of women ... it is necessary. We must prepare ourselves to ensure that women who do not get married have the means to earn an honest living." In these days, this was feminism before it even existed. And he also said: "One should work on equality between

Pierre de Coubertin was first represented on three Haiti stamps issued on 3rd October 1939. The profit from these was to help finance the building of a stadium in Port-au-Prince. But because of the high costs and the start of the Second World War the series was not a commercial success.

Photo: Rüdiger Fritz Archive

COUBERTIN FAMILY TREE (simplified)



men and women". Finally, "The equivalence of the sexes is already a reality, develop and complete this equivalence is a noble ambition ... the more this equivalence will be perfect, the more respect and mutual affection in the couple are likely to grow," and "Who says men companion nowadays means associate". But initially in fact, he was hostile to the active participation of women in the Olympics. And this may very well be explained: first the ancient Games were for men only, but once again, we must replace Coubertin in his time and in his environment. Because in 1880 very few women played sport competition, as very few entered the army, and they were not sent in the first line of battle. Their role was different and violent sports like boxing were forbidden to them; if they took place, they were hidden for bids or sordid and illegal gains, sometimes with an aspect of voyeurism. The Pope had also condemned the participation of women in sports competitions.

Indeed, the rules for women had to be considerably modified; still now, women's tennis competitions are played in 3 sets instead of 5 for men; a woman cannot box against a man; equality in body between man and women does not exist. But Coubertin said that ultimately it would be the public who would decide, and he finally accepted it. He attended the Women's Tennis Championships at the 1924 Games in Paris, without flinching and with respect. Finally he said that if he came back 100 years later, he would be able to question everything he had built 100 years earlier. He would accept the present Games.

- 9 *Les Départ des Missionnaires* is one of the important and very academic paintings by Charles de Coubertin in the lovely church of the Foreign Missions in Paris VIIth (17th century). One can see the famous musician Gounod, organist for this church, the famous Jesuit father Lacordaire, the Archbishop X etc. Charles de Coubertin painted among the spectators his mother, his wife and in front two kids, his last two children Marie and Pierre de Coubertin.

10 I regard it as unfair to say that Pierre de Coubertin was a fascist. First of all one cannot talk in France about collaboration with the German fascists before the 18th June 1940 (the call from General de Gaulle). Pierre de Coubertin died three years before and the Games in Berlin took place in August 1936 almost 4 years before. Obviously the Germans had prepared the very best Games ever, because Hitler wanted them to be a big show for the Nazi regime. Hitler and Carl Diem flattered a lot Pierre de Coubertin who was retired in Lausanne; old, sick and totally forgotten by the French people. He must have been happy to see his Olympic Games finally well appreciated and beautifully organised. May I recall also that in 1936, many politicians including Winston Churchill and the US President still hoped to avoid the war. It was only in late 1937 and early 1938 (Pierre de Coubertin was already dead!) that the Second World War became inevitable (especially after the annexation of Austria by the Reich 1938).

I will try to be objective first in quoting two undisputed experts on Pierre de Coubertin and then add my personal opinion and especially that of members of the family who have known him well.

1. Christian Gillieron writes 1993 in his documented and reference book *The relations between the City of Lausanne and the Olympic Movement at the time of Pierre de Coubertin, 1894-1939*, p. 158: "Coubertin had no particular sympathy for the Nazi regime, but like many of his contemporaries, he did not clearly realize the true nature of it in 1936. Weakened by age and bitterness, like many others in Switzerland, he only saw that Germany was organising wonderful Games, that Germany was finally re-starting the excavations in Olympia in Greece and that Germany was multiplying attention towards him while all the other countries including France particularly had forgotten him. Therefore he was dazzled by the Berlin Games and did not condemn Nazism, which is something certain people wrongly accuse him of today [...]"

2. Jean Durry, a great specialist together with Norbert Müller on Pierre de Coubertin, wrote in 1997 *Le vrai Pierre de Coubertin*, p. 72: "The real Pierre de Coubertin did not disavow the 1936 Berlin Games, even if he refused to attend and called Hitler a strange person ... He thanked the Führer and his great and enthusiastic friend Carl Diem, who designed the first torch relay in history. In the interview for the newspaper *L'Auto*, of the 4th of September 1936, he expressed his feelings: "In Berlin we were moved by an ideal that we do not have to judge, but which was the passionate excitement which I have always been looking for." Should we go for that as far as to say that Coubertin was a fascist? No. Does it make him a supporter of the totalitarian regimes and philosophies, which imprisoned and tracked the human being that all his work wants to promote with the development of the body and the spirit? In truth the confusion seems to us not only grotesque, but difficult to accept".

3. Finally the unanimous opinion of his family and friends: there is no doubt for his wife, for my father close to her, for all his relatives and friends that he would have condemned German Nazism in 1940 (more than 3 years after his death). The Coubertin family had always been very patriotic: the second elder brother of Pierre, Albert de Coubertin was officer. His elder brother Paul – already 67 years old – did not go to war but his two daughters, aged respectively 21 and 24, were nurses in the army and received lots of decorations (honors, medals of the resistance) in 1918 and even more in 1944. Their brother Guy and their mother were killed in the bombing of Paris in the church Saint Gervais during a religious service by the huge German cannon called "Paris Gun" in 1918 with a hundred other people. Not to mention that Pierre de Coubertin's wife was from an Alsatian family whose father had been a famous "député protestataire" (protesting deputy). I inherited many of all the decorations especially those of Marie-Macelle de Coubertin, my god-mother, who knew her uncle Pierre de Coubertin for more than 48 years. I often spoke to her about Pierre de Coubertin during my frequent visits until 1978. She never thought one minute that Pierre de Coubertin could have not supported the French Resistance if he had lived 4 more years. In 1940 Pierre de Coubertin would definitively have condemn Hitler and the Nazism as most French patriots did. He had the ability to change his mind when necessary and he proved it many times during his life (i.e. when he became

a Republican after a visit to the Count de Chambord, heir to the throne of France in exile with his parents in Austria, although he had always been a royalist like the whole family (see also footnote 13).

Another close member of his family, his nephew Maurice de Madre (1879–1970), also a remarkable man I knew very well, having lived through the two world wars and very close to Pierre de Coubertin for 58 years, was shocked and did not even want to hear about such a stupidity. Maurice de Madre was the son of Marie de Coubertin, sister of Pierre de Coubertin and became an orphan in a young age. Pierre de Coubertin was very close to Marie to his sister, when she became a young widow with three kids and took care a lot of the boy, his nephew Maurice. The difference in age was only 16 years and they stayed very close for 58 years and lived both in Switzerland for different reasons, not far from each other. Maurice de Madre wrote two booklets on Pierre de Coubertin in 1944. One was about his public life and the Olympic Games and the other about his private life and his personality. He also had an interesting correspondence with the IOC President about Pierre de Coubertin, which my father left to me, as he was the executor and heir of both uncle Pierre and uncle Maurice. Finally I would like to mention that the wife of Pierre de Coubertin who survived him very long (from 1937 to 1964) would have been very shocked by such an accusation to be a fascist. My father would have called it a speculation without interest and so would Yvonne and Marie-Marcelle de Coubertin, who despised such discussions and controversy close to evil spirit.

11 When Pierre de Coubertin retired in 1925 he was indeed made the Honorary President for life as founder of the Games. But in 1993, when President Juan Antonio Samaranch retired, he was considered the second. He handled the largest development and transformation of the Games with the immense wealth that the TV rights brought, while trying to be as faithful as possible to the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin, quoting him as much as possible.

12 In 1915, Pierre de Coubertin moved the Headquarters of the IOC to Lausanne, Switzerland and a neutral country. It was not obvious and he did not ask the advice of many members of the IOC, some of them probably would not have approved the move. In order to make the move in 1915 official, he started spending a lot of time in Lausanne and announced that he would reside there. But he also wanted to serve his country in the army during the war even already 51 years old! He signed in the army in Paris and spent two years in France without going practically at all to Lausanne; the still relatively small volume of archives of the IOC were not in Lausanne at that time but in fact with his friend Godefroy de Blonay, the Vice-President of the IOC near Montreux. During that time Pierre de Coubertin did not have a proper place to stay in Lausanne and the discussions with the municipality were still under way. The IOC Archives were only moved from Montreux 1925, when Pierre de Coubertin retired and was able to get a proper place to live from the municipality in Lausanne. He then really settled down in a small furnished apartment in the hotel Beau-Séjour in Lausanne. His office was in the Villa "Mon-Repos". He could only get a proper flat in 1930 in the villa where all his furniture was stored since 1922–1923 (furniture from his mansion in Rue Oudinot and of his flat, 10 bd. Flandrin in Paris). He only stayed for four years in Lausanne in a proper flat, sold then a lot of things to get some money and moved to the Pension Melrose in Geneva in 1933 where he died 4 years later.

13 These families were the "pure" royalists in favor of the Bourbon family (the brothers of Louis XVI and then the Count of Chambord in exile, their nephew) against the Orleanists, who followed the Orleans family (the last King of France, a cousin of Louis-Philippe, who was King of the French with a constitution, and not King of France with rights from God). The Bourbons or Legitimists considered the Orleanists as usurpers, whose father the Duke of Orleans had voted the death of his cousin, the King of France Louis XVI in 1792 during the French Revolution.

It is easy to explain why the family Coubertin were Legitimists like a lot of aristocrats in France at that time. Caroline de Pardieu, the mother of Charles de Coubertin and grandmother of Pierre de Coubertin had been raised in exile in Sussex (England) by her father, the Marquis de Pardieu, who followed the brother of the King in England, the future King Louis the XVIII. I have an ink



drawing of the house in Sussex, signed X de Pardieu, coming from the main staircase of the Castle of Coubertin (now in the Castle of de Navacelle) on the back of which Charles de Coubertin wrote: "House where was born my mother, Caroline de Pardieu, Baroness of Coubertin [wife of Julien Bonaventure, the first Baron] in 1797, in Emigration".

After the killing of the King of France many French families have immigrated to England following the Royal family and leaving all their properties on the very recommendation of the King himself. The King escaped in the famous "fuite à Varennes" (escape to Varennes) to Belgium and asked his brothers to escape to England in order to split the risks for the Royal family. This in fact was smart because it allowed the return of the Bourbons in 1815 after Napoléon. The Marquis de Pardieu was one of those immigrants and his daughter Caroline was raised close to the future King Louis XVIII in Sussex.

After his return to France, the King remembered the Pardieu and when Julien Bonaventure married Caroline, the King gave his blessings and the Royal family (the two sisters of the King) went to the wedding in 1820 (I have their wedding medal). And in 1821, the King made Julien Bonaventure first Baron de Coubertin, giving him a hereditary title by Decree, for his loyalty and services rendered. This explains why the only child Charles, second Baron and the father of Pierre de Coubertin and the whole family were Royalists in favor of the Bourbons. It was them and not the Orleanists, who had given them the title of nobility. This old family traced back to 1477 had never had a title despite certain famous military officers in the 17th and 18th centuries, faithful to the Kings of France. This title was a great honor in the early years after Napoléon and made them very happy. Their son Pierre proved once again that he was very modern and open-minded for his time and environment when he became a Republican.

14 "L'essentiel est de participer" (The key is to participate) is a sentence pronounced by the Archbishop of Pennsylvania Monsignor Edelbert Talbot at St. Paul's cathedral in London for the Olympics of 1908 to support the US participants. Pierre de Coubertin liked it so much that he took it over and beautifully developed it quoting the Archbishop in his speech in 24th July 1908 at a dinner hosted by the British Government for the IOC: "Last Sunday at the ceremony held at St. Paul's cathedral, in honor of the athletes, the Bishop of Pennsylvania recalled it nicely: The important thing during the Olympiad is less to gain than to take part. Let us gentlemen remember this strong word, the important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle; the main thing is not to have beaten, but to have fought well".

15 The only heir of Pierre de Coubertin (and of his wife afterwards) besides the IOC is Christian de Navacelle, my father, while there are many descendants. For the rest of the Coubertin family (Yvonne and Marie-Marcelle) there are only two heirs, Christian and Geoffroy de Navacelle, while there are a lot of descendants (almost 100).

The Crests of the Family de Coubertin; given by the French King 1696 and represented at the Pediment of the Castle Saint-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse.