Football, Cricket and Quoits

A context for the early Wenlock Olympian Games

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On Monday 25 February 1850, ten years after the founding of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society, and nearly twenty since Dr William Penny Brookes had set up his practice in the town, the Olympian Class of the Society was established, for "the promotion of the moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the inhabitants of the Town & Neighbourhood of Wenlock and especially of the Working Classes, by the encouragement of out-door recreation, and by the award of Prizes annually at public meetings for skill in Athletic exercises and proficiency in intellectual and industrial attainments."[1] Whether this was solely Brookes's idea, why it was thought necessary, or advisable, and how the Olympian name was chosen is not stated.

Surprisingly, little or no research seems to have been done into how these forerunners of the modern Olympic Games suddenly sprang into existence. Vague references are made to Brookes's brief early sojourns in Paris or Padua, but little is known of them, and whatever they were, such ardour as they inspired was kept on a very low burner for decades before they eventually burst into life.

It is said that he was strongly influenced by Joseph Strutt's 1801 book, The Sports and Pastimes of Old England,[2] and also by contemporary interest in the discovery of the site of Olympia, but neither of these are reflected to any great extent in the games as they actually began. Although all the events at Wenlock were indeed described in Strutt's book, it was so comprehensive that it would be more remarkable if they were not. More surprisingly, Strutt only refers to the Olympic/Olympian Games four times, twice in connection with wrestling, once describing the management of a foot-race, and once, in a poem, he assumes to allude to "tennice, or the balloon ball". Robert Dover's Games, at Chipping Camden in the Cotswolds, are given fair mention in the introduction, but they are not referred to as Olimpick (as they are now usually called), and none of the sports specifically mentioned (except, rather vaguely, 'leaping') were included in the first Olympian Games. Olympia, it is true, had been rediscovered in 1766 by the English adventurer Richard Chandler, and partially excavated in the 1820s by the French, but little popular interest was aroused in Britain before 1875, when the German Archaeological Institute conducted a full scale excavation of the site, 25 years after the first Olympian Games. Indeed, with the fairly rapid introduction of events for women, jing-

ling matches and wheelbarrow races, the Much Wenlock games increasingly resembled a typical rural festivity of a kind that had been going on for years, and thus appear, far from a bold new initiative, rather the opposite, and even a late addition to Britain's country sports meetings. In the absence of hard evidence, this article is an attempt to find a context for the Wenlock games, and to infer some of the influences that must have worked on Brookes's hitherto dormant enthusiasm for athletic sports, and finally ignited the fire that drove him from Wenlock to Liverpool and beyond.

The Early Olympian Games

1850. From the crimson-leather-covered gold-embossed Wenlock Olympian Class minute book, inscribed with Horatio Nelson's motto 'Palmam qui meruit ferat,' we can see that arrangements were immediately put in place for the conduct of the first games. A subscription of one shilling was decided on, and a committee was set up of the President of the Reading Society, the class's own President, Treasurer and Secretary, and six other members. John Elmer was the first President, Edwin Yardley Treasurer, and William Brookes Secretary. Brookes was, of course a prominent citizen, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and Justice of the Peace, but Elmer, Yardley and the others were local tradesmen.[3]

A shilling was a substantial part of a labourer's daily wage[4] so it is a moot point as to quite how attractive to the 'working classes' it was possible for the games to be, although as it turned out there was no shortage of subscribers.

Surprisingly, the committee's next recorded meeting was on 18 October, just four days before the first Olympian Games, to decide the programme of events. These were to consist of Cricket, Quoits and Football (total prize money – £2/17/0), four foot races and two jumps (total prize money – £1/17/6). The accounts immediately following this record show that 105 subscribers duly paid their shillings, 13 more donated two shillings and sixpence or five shillings and four others gave ten shillings each. Cricket equipment[5] and a football were purchased, but not quoits, which were presumably already to hand. Advertisements were printed and a band and tent hired for the occasion, although surely some of that must have already been sorted before the October committee meeting. Conveniently, income is shown exactly matching expenditure, in spite of a mistake in the adding up.[6] The total turnover was £10/15/0. It is interesting to note that in spite of the aspirations of the class described in February, there is no mention of events or prizes for "proficiency in intellectual and industrial attainments," an aspect of their Olympian ideal which took a couple of years to take root, and even then was mainly confined to children.

To inaugurate the games, on Tuesday 22 October, after a grand procession to the racecourse in Edward Crowther's field on the outskirts of the town, Dr Brookes gave an introductory speech explaining to the public and press the value of the occasion, quoting from a recent pamphlet, published in 1848, entitled 'An Address To The Middle Classes Upon The Subject Of Gymnastic Exercises' by Lord Dalmeny. This will be examined in more detail below. He also thanked the subscribers, especially "Lord Granville, Sir F. Lawley, The Hon. Colonel Forester and J.M. Gaskell MP," all wealthy dignitaries of the area, but not especially noted for their interest in rural sport.[7]

This first meeting is extensively, but perhaps not very accurately, reported in Eddowes's Journal.[8] It began with the cricket match, between two teams apparently selected on the spot by Messrs Yardley and Jones as captains. Between innings the first foot race, for boys not exceeding 7 years of age,[9] was arranged in three heats, the second and final[10] being won by George Thomas, son of the innkeeper of the White Horse, who thus became the first Olympic laureate of modern times. The cricket concluded with a win by Mr Yardley's team and a prize of two shillings each, and an extra five shillings to Thomas Yates, hairdresser, for the highest score.

Next came the 14-a-side Football match, which was so exciting that no details were reported, but which lasted over an hour and was followed by the next foot race, for boys not exceeding 14 years, which was won by Henry Lawley, son of the local stationer, postmaster, and purchaser of most of the books for the Reading Society.

Eddowes's Journal goes on to list the winners of the Quoits, Leaping for Height and Distance, and the Hopping Race, without saying whether these were held on the same day, or how the games were divided up over the two-day event. If both the cricket and football were held on the Tuesday, then the Wednesday activities couldn't have lasted very long. Lord John Manners arrived on the afternoon of the first day, and offered a one pound prize, which they decided to give to the winner of an adult foot-race, John Hickman.[11] Manners was staying at Willey Hall, seat of his brother-in-law Cecil Weld-Forester, and accompanied by a party including Mr Lister of Roughton [sic. perhaps Broughton, near Shrewsbury] and Mr Fane, who also donated prizes. Both Manners (who took out a permanent subscription to the games in 1855) and Fane may have played more important parts in the origin of the games than has been recognised.

Although in retrospect there is no doubt that this original meeting was indeed the forerunner of more genuinely 'Olympian' games, it must be admitted on this evidence that the only connection it had with Greece was the name, and although that may have derived from Lord Dalmeny's putative comparison of the relative athletic strengths of nineteenth century Englishmen and classical Greeks, there was no attempt to emulate early Olympic sports, the most important of which, to most nineteenth century sportsmen, were riding and wrestling, neither of which featured in Brookes's games. I have heard that the Wenlock Bowling Society had for some years competed for a large 'Olympic' cup, which may have contributed to Brookes's idea for the title of his meeting.[12]

1851. The second Wenlock Olympian Games were not reported in Eddowes's Journal at all, but luckily the Shrewsbury Chronicle was present, so a detailed account of these too is fortunately preserved.[13] An advertisement

for the games published three weeks beforehand presents Cricket, Football and Quoits, as before, but now five footraces (an Under 11 race being introduced), leaping for distance and height, a foot-hurdle race (what we would call a steeplechase, being a mile in distance, although touching the hurdles was forbidden), and a startling and in the event almost wholly unsatisfactory innovation, archery. The subsequent account of the games, held on 23 and 24 September 1851, omits the Under 11 race, if it occurred at all, and the junior archery, but includes "throwing a stone of 15lbs" and the famous "old woman's footrace for a pound of tea" although the winner, Mary Speake, was only 45. The archery is dismissed as "a very unskilful contest, the candidates all being unpractised hands with the exception of the winner."

A major sponsor of this meeting, significantly, was Robert Aglionby Slaney, MP for Shrewsbury. Turnover had doubled since 1850, now reaching £23/3/0, with 184 people paying from 1 to 5 shillings, and eleven contributing 10 shillings or more.[14]

If possible, however, these games were even less Olympic than the ones before, and worse was to follow. Although they had been a great success, "attended by a very large concourse of spectators", who nevertheless preserved "the greatest order and sobriety", the organising committee were clearly slightly miffed that only one man from Wenlock had actually won anything. At the Annual General Meeting of the Agricultural Reading Society (Olympic [sic] Class) they suggested that "the competitors be limited to residents within the Borough or not more than five miles from Wenlock." Possibly to discourage bounty hunters, they also advised that "money prizes should as far as possible be discouraged."[15]

1852. The third games were on 22 and 23 September 1852, and held for the first time in Samuel Ainsworth's field at the foot of Windmill Hill. From the report in Eddowes's Journal,[16] it appears that while cricket, quoits, throwing the stone, archery and leaping for height and distance were unrestricted in their entry, football, the adult footrace and the hurdles were in two sections; open, and "restricted to residents of the Borough".[17] Instead of the women's race there was knitting, with sewing for girls, and finally a wheelbarrow race and a jingling match, two events commonly found at village festivities all around Britain at the time. Nineteenth century newspapers report celebrations for the treaty of Amiens, for the coronation of George IV, for the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and various local reasons such as the coming of age or engagement of a wealthy landowner's son (see, for instance, the paragraph on Watkin Williams-Wynne, below), and most of them involved at least three of the following: wrestling, a sack race, women's racing (for a shift, a teapot or something similar), various leaping events and a jingling match.[18]

1853 – 1857. For the next five years the fledgling games very slowly taught themselves to fly. They reduced to a single day, abandoning cricket, which had not realised expectations, to make room for the two football matches. 'Prison Base' was included in 1855 and 'Jumping in bags', another rural staple, introduced in 1856.

The following year expanded to include climbing a greasy pole (for a hat at the top), and a donkey race. Knitting and sewing (for girls under 14) and arithmetic and writing (for boys under 14) were the usual extent of the "industrial and intellectual" aspirations of the meeting, although English History, Bible History and Drawing were included in 1857, mostly to encourage pupils at the National School.

1858. In 1858 the games moved permanently to the Windmill Hill field, and the first tilting match was held. This is another aspect of the games sometimes attributed to Joseph Strutt's The Sports and Pastimes of Old England[19], which is not borne out by closer inspection. Strutt prefers "Running at the Ring" as the common name, and his description and diagram of the frame and ring itself are very different from what was set up at Wenlock. Although somewhat tenuous, two possibly mutually contributory factors have been identified. The first is the exhibition of armour at the National Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester the year before, and the enthusiasm of William Wynn, Robert Slaney's son-in-law. This will be discussed below.

The second is the publication in 1854 of 'The Star Chamber', by the celebrated William Harrison Ainsworth.[20] Although I cannot find that he was closely related[21] to Samuel Ainsworth, who owned Windmill Hill, the book was very popular, and contains a detailed description of a tilting match – something not found in 'Ivanhoe'[22], for example, or Ainsworth's earlier book, 'Windsor Castle.'[23]

Three days before the 1858 games, "a correspondent writing from Athens" wrote his famous letter to the Times, later copied by Eddowes's Journal (among many other newspapers) and quoted by David C. Young,[24] regarding the re-establishment of the Olympic Games in Athens.

1859. And then quite suddenly the Wenlock Games became a phenomenon. The annual turnover trebled,[25] the cup for tilting alone (£10) costing almost as much the entire income of 1850. Printed programmes appeared for the first time, and James Milnes Gaskell paid for spectator seating to be erected on the hill. David Young takes up the story from here, and his discoveries regarding the relationships between Brookes (who seems to have taken on a whole new lease of life at this time), Evangelis Zappas, and eventually Pierre de Coubertin are too well known to be necessary to repeat. Suffice it to say that although Pierre de Coubertin's dismissal of the games by 1890 as purely local, popular, mediaeval sports was clearly grossly unfair, had Evangelis Zappas made the same comment in 1858, before Brookes was aware of his attempt to reinstitute the ancient games in Greece, he would have had considerably more justification.

The following sections explore in more detail some of the people who are mentioned as contributing to the early Olympian Games, showing how in many cases they not only lent their patronage, but may have shaped the programme as well.

Robert Aglionby Slaney (1790-1862) MP for Shrewsbury 4 times between 1832-1862

Although he is not registered as a patron of the Olympian Class till 1851, Robert Slaney had been a steadfast supporter of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society, and was a tireless campaigner for the improvement of the working classes. His contribution to the Olympian Games may have occurred as early as 1824, when he published a pamphlet with the unexciting title 'An Essay on the Beneficial Direction of Rural Expenditure'.[26] The essay exhorts the wealthy to spend on the poor, and has a Chapter 13 entitled 'On Festivals For the Working Class,' in which he extols the benefits of such generosity.

"The rich cannot more beneficially expend a small portion of their superfluous income, than in entertaining once or twice a-year the cottagers on their estates." This would ensure popularity among his tenants. "The landlord should request a holiday for them, and at an early hour on the day he fixes, which should be when the weather is warm and not during harvest, a moderate and fitting entertainment should be given them." This was most likely to take the form of a meal, at which, if the host wasn't careful, his guests were likely to get drunk.

However Slaney thought this was probably due to their "having no place of exercise or amusement on their holiday," as he had observed that there was little drunkenness at cricket matches. It seemed to be a peculiarity of the English, as no one misbehaved at similar festivals in Tuscany or France.

"At our rural festival no one should be admitted who was not neatly clothed, or who received parochial relief; no one who had misconducted themselves since the former meeting," but "there seems no reason why the farming servants residing on the proprietor's estate should be excluded, on producing a ticket of their conduct signed by their master or mistress."

"Music should be provided to enliven the scene, and some kind of rural sport should be introduced. Dancing, prison bars, foot-ball, quoits, cricket, etc., and a prize be given to the winning party." Importantly, "the meeting should break up at an early hour, that all may return home whilst it is light."

Here we have no reference to Olympia and the Greeks, and surely Slaney's ideas took a long time to take root, but this is quite an exact description of the first Olympian Games, written less than fifteen miles from their birthplace, even before Brookes left on his continental travels. The emphasis on sobriety, the importance of social interaction between landlord and tenant, the music, the celebration dinner, even the injunction to finish before nightfall, let alone the cricket and quoits, were all features of the early Wenlock Games.

Lord Dalmeny (1809-1851) MP for Stirling 1842-1847

Lord Dalmeny was the second of three successive Archibald Primroses. He was the oldest son of the 4th Earl of Rosebery, a title which since he died before his father he never inherited, passing it directly to his son, the more famous 5th Earl, Prime Minister in 1894 and 1895. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge, he was an early associate of Lord John Manners until his sudden death in 1851. Although not local to Wenlock, his 'Address to the Middle Classes upon the Subject of Gymnastic Exercises'[27] clearly made an impact on William Penny Brookes, who quoted from it at some length in his inaugural address.

Dalmeny addresses his remarks specifically to "the inhabitants of large towns," decrying the fact that although recent improvements in sanitation have helped to prevent disease, there has not been any attempt to improve the overall fitness of the population. He thinks that, by and large, the lower classes are sufficiently physically exercised by their daily labour, and the upper classes by their "exercise or diversion," but that the tradesman regularly works twelve hours a day, and at "eight or nine" at night enjoys various relaxing (but inactive) occupations until he goes to bed. Significantly, Dalmeny mentions, albeit somewhat disparagingly, the "literary and scientific societies, mechanic reading clubs, schools for philosophy and art," but laments the lack of gymnasia in increasingly heroic tone.

"Where are the arenas, on which the limbs, the sinews, the spirits of our merchants may be recreated and refreshed by manly diversions? Where are the noble sports of our ancestors? Where are the rude but invigorating pastimes, which hardened their muscles, steeled their nerves, expanded their frames, exhilarated their spirits and gladdened their hearts? What sports are there now to smooth the brow of care, to dispel the vapours of spleen, to make poverty forget its wretchedness, or sorrow smile amidst its woe? We are the wisest, the greatest, but the saddest nation in the world."

He goes on to explain that although the British have lost these ideas, the ancients understood them thoroughly, especially the Greeks. And before readers could dismiss their physical excellence as a peculiar characteristic of a Golden Age, he points out that in fact the Greeks were probably smaller than modern man, and that their "historians make constant allusions to the gigantic size of the Teutonic nations." Nor have modern Northern European men degenerated in stature from their forbears, as in recent experiments, modern men had been too big to put on old suits of armour.

"At Lord Eglinton's tournament, scarcely a knight could squeeze himself into the corselets of the middle ages," and Sir Samuel Meyrick found that not one of his 60 suits of armour would fit a couple of English guests. Nor, again, was their any degeneracy in civilisation, as Englishmen had recently demonstrated their supremacy over North American Indians in various feats of strength and speed. In fact, it was Dalmeny's "firm belief" that modern Englishmen possessed "the elements of greater physical power than the natives of other countries" and achieved "extraordinary performances unsurpassed, or even unequalled, in ancient or modern times. Were the Olympian victors to come again to life, it would be easy to find their match between the Thames and the Spey."

Now, he asserts is a particularly propitious moment to attempt a trial. "A wise determination exists, among the

middle classes of our towns, to shorten the hours of work by the earlier closing of their shops. Why not devote the interval of time thus gained to physical recreation?"

What he really wants is the setting up of local gymnasia, so that people don't have to go too far to find suitable equipment. All that is needed is "a room thirty feet square, a ladder, a few poles, a handful of ropes and a couple of dozen foils." He concludes by saying that he has himself gained more from fencing at Mr Hamon's or Mr Angelo's gymnasia than stalking in Braemar or walking in Switzerland.

No mention here of Football, Cricket or Quoits, and the context is strictly urban and middle – rather than labouring class, but the reference to the Greeks and the Olympic Games, and the value of reviving them, is clear if implicit.

Lord John Manners (1818-1906) MP for 4 Home Counties constituencies 1841-1888

The support and appearance of Lord John Manners to a "most enthusiastic" reception at the first Olympian Games, provides the next suggestion as to possible inspiration behind the Wenlock Games. The younger son of the 5th Earl of Rutland, educated at Eton and Cambridge, poet, MP and encourager of sport, John Manners's chief claim to fame is his practical support for the Young England Movement, a romantic and somewhat naive political campaign to reintroduce a benign feudalism into what they saw as the failure of industrial socialism. Led originally by Benjamin Disraeli, the movement campaigned strongly for the reduction of the working day to ten hours, and less definitively, for greater social interaction between the classes, albeit based largely on noblesse oblige rather than any sense of equality.[28]

To this end Lord John Manners was delighted to lend his name to, and continued support as President of the Birmingham Athenic Institute, founded in 1842, "to educate, improve and exercise the mental and physical organisation" of its members.[29] For two shillings a quarter members could avail themselves of the 400 volume reading library, lectures, and social activities. There was a gymnastics meeting once a month or so during the winter, and in the summer members could "participate in cricket, quoits, and other health-inspiring sports in their own field, at the outskirts of the town."[30]

Although the daily activities of this society are not reported in detail, its annual general meetings, invariably attended by Manners,[31] describe an aspiration almost identical to that of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society.

In 1845 (and possibly other years) Lord Lyttelton hosted a fête for the Institute at his Worcestershire residence, Hagley Hall.[32] This took the form of a ceremonial procession, and competitions in Football, Cricket and Quoits. Lyttelton and Manners themselves captained the cricket teams. Hagley Hall is a mere 25 miles from Wenlock.

While I cannot find that John Manners corresponded with Brookes, the founding of such institutes for working men, their classical names (the Manchester Atheneum, for example, as well as the Birmingham Athenic Institute) and their occasional enthusiasm for a physical aspect to their activities – particularly for Football, Cricket and Quoits – expressed a spirit of the age that must surely have been one of the stimuli that prompted Brookes to do likewise.

It must be said, however, that the Young England Movement was quite widely considered absurd, and its patrician attitude to class (and rural games) thought patronising and contemptible. The urban lower middle class, particularly, felt that they were being insulted. When the coming-of-age festivities of John William Ramsden, 5th Baronet, of Longley Hall, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire, were advertised in 1852, a "densely crowded" public meeting was held in the Philosophical Hall, at which a unanimous resolution was passed to encourage everybody to boycott the games, even as spectators.

"While this meeting highly approves of amusements for the working classes", it had seen the advertisement for this celebration and considered the sports to be "of a highly objectionable nature, worthy only of an uncivilised age and people." It expressed "its indignant sense of the degrading estimate of the tastes, intelligence and character of the working population of this town implied n such programme" and recommended that the working classes "abstain from all participation, even as spectators."[33] Copies of the resolution were sent to John Ramsden and various associates.

Punch magazine took this up with glee and weighed in with an open letter (by 'Powderpuff') addressed to Lord Manners.[34] After sneering at the events, such as the Donkey Race ("capital fun, you know"), Climbing a Pole ("very amusing, your Lordship") and Hunting a Pig ("pretty diversion, if not what you call intellectual"), the author quotes the Huddersfield meeting in mock horror, and regrets that peasants aren't what they were in the good old days, when "a lout would have thought himself highly honoured if required by a gentleman to grin through a horse-collar." Those days, he insists, are over.

Precisely what sports would have been considered appropriate were not specified either by the Huddersfield meeting or by Punch, and although this particular event may not have been successful, the continued popularity of rural sports in the countryside suggests that their rejection was an especially urban characteristic.

Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn (1820-1885), 6th Baronet Wynnstay MP for Denbighshire 1841-1885, Lord of the Manor of Wenlock

Although Sir Watkin is not recorded as having become involved (as a sponsor) in the Olympian Games until 1853, he was no stranger to rural sports, having enjoyed a huge celebration of his own near Oswestry on 22 May 1841, on the occasion of his coming of age. Apart from endless bands, processions and feasts, there was an almost complete schedule of rustic games (with the extraordinary exception of football, cricket and quoits!). There were pony and donkey races, footraces, hurdles and a steeplechase, races for women (including one for a pound

of tea), wheelbarrow race, bag race, pig chase and a race "on all fours" (very unusual), climbing a pole for various prizes on the top, bobbing for fruit, hasty pudding eating, a grinning (now invariably called girning) match and a jingling match. There was even a donkey tournament, for knights armed with broomsticks, which may have derived in part from the Eglinton Tournament (see below). Most of these turned up at the Wenlock games in their early stages, and if they were not directly attributable to the Lord of the Manor, it is difficult to refuse at least some local connection.[35]

Col. John Fane (1804-1875) MP for Oxfordshire 1862-1868

In 1839 Lord Eglinton announced, rehearsed, publicised and finally staged an elaborate re-enaction of a mediaeval tournament. Although the event itself was held in Scotland, it was advertised and rehearsed in London, and hundreds of people eventually travelled north as spectators. It was a vast and expensive folie de grandeur, and in the end largely ruined by torrential rain, providing satirical newspapers with pages of sardonic humour. Col. John William Fane had watched the rehearsals with some enthusiasm, but not attended the final event. Nevertheless, he was sufficiently inspired by it (and its bathetic conclusion) to stage a burlesque version at his estate at Wormsley Park, near High Wycombe.[36] On 6th August 1840, he and a group of friends equipped themselves with various items of domestic ironware, mounted donkeys, and conducted a joust.

Although it all sounds very informal, some five thousand local people watched it, there was a band and a procession, and a dinner for three hundred friends and neighbours in the evening. The results of each joust were carefully recorded and the whole thing reported at length in Jackson's Oxford Journal. In subsequent years a number of other 'donkey tournaments' were held up and down the country.

This same John Fane attended the first Olympian Games as one of John Manners's party, and although 'tilting at the ring' took another eight years to materialise, it is inconceivable that it didn't have some derivation from the Eglinton Tournament and its aftermath.

Curiously, the Victorian enthusiasm for all things mediaeval, epitomised by Walter Scott's Ivanhoe and Pugin's architectural Gothic revival, was largely on the wane by the time tilting was instituted at Wenlock, although they clearly remained a popular anachronism for many years.

William Watkin Edward Wynn (1801-1880), MP for Merioneth 1852-865

William Wynn was a historian and antiquary and close friend, advisor and editor of the works of Samuel Meyrick, whose unsurpassed collection of mediaeval armour had failed to fit any of the combatants of the Eglinton tournament. He was married to Mary, daughter of Robert Aglionby Slaney, and a distant cousin of Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. William Wynn would have been interested, and perhaps involved in the exhibition of Meyrick's armour at the National Art Treasures Exhibition which opened in Manchester in May 1857,[37] and may have been instrumental in the decision to introduce tilting at the games the following year.

By ten years later, in 1867, the mediaeval quality of the games had inspired both a herald, and an elaborate costume to go with him. A photograph of the rather awkward 15-year old son of the hairdresser who had won five shillings for his cricket in 1850, another Thomas Yates, shows him in white breeches, a gold-embroidered green tunic, and a red velvet tabard, decorated with three coats of arms and a motto. This is on display in Much Wenlock museum, with a label suggesting it may have come from a London Theatre, but the embroidered coats of arms suggest otherwise. The chest bears three sheaves of hay and a bishop's crosier, which are the arms of the Monastery of Wenlock, and the left sleeve a chevron between three bearded severed heads, the arms of an early Baron Wenlock. The right arm carries a rather generic lion rampant, possibly for Lockyer of Wenlock, but is difficult to be specific about as all the embroidered arms show gold charges on a silver field, which are not (nor intended to be) heraldically correct. Even if the tabard was originally from London, it has clearly been quite expensively localised. The motto, embroidered on a scroll beneath the shield on the chest, reads 'Pro Deo Rege et Lege' ('For God, King and the Law'), whose provenance I can't discover, although coincidentally it is also the motto of a region of Croatia.[38]

Conclusion

The Olympian Games of 1850-1859 are poised between the ancient Greek games and the modern Olympic revival, and it is natural for a long view to see threads connecting them forwards and backwards in time. However, with due regard to the actual records of the occasion, it is not at all obvious that the originators had any such aspirations, at least to start with. Until 1859, their sports were traditionally English, their participants strictly local apart from a couple of crowd-pullers, and, in spite of an abortive attempt to "discourage" monetary prizes, there was no attempt at amateurism.

The early Wenlock Games, like several others around the country, derived from local aristocratic enthusiasm, traditional rural sports and a certain amount of neo-gothic romanticism, with only a minimal nod towards pre-Christian Olympia.

As it stands, this sounds rather iconoclastic towards the character of William Penny Brookes, but it is important to understand that his position was not at all dictatorial (although clearly he was very influential), and that he made considerable efforts to include the people of Wenlock as part of the organising body. It may be that his personal vision, perhaps formed in whole or in part as long ago as 1830, continued to be held in check until the news of Evangelis Zappas's games finally enabled him to share his ideas more explicitly with his Wenlock co-

ordinators, and obtain their support for a much better expression of his original ideas. ■

Notes and Acknowledgements

Although much of this article was derived from the internet, the two most important sources were the minute books of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society and its offshoot, the Olympian Class. These are kept in a little room behind the council office in Much Wenlock, and I am very grateful to Chris Cannon, archivist and current Chairman of the Olympian Society, for allowing me many hours of his time to carry out my research.

1 This and subsequent quotations are from the first Minute Book of the Olympian Class of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society, held at the archives of the Wenlock Olympian Society, a few pages being reproduced on the Society website, www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk

2 STRUTT, Joseph, The Sports and Pastimes of Old England, Methuen & Co., London 1801, at www.archive.org

3 The ages and professions of local inhabitants are from the Censuses of 1851 and 1861, reproduced at www.ancestry.co.uk

4 CLARK, Gregory, "Farm Wages and Living Standards in the Industrial Revolution: England, 1670-1850", in: Economic History Review, 2001, online as a pdf at www.econ.ucdavis.edu

5 One bat and one ball.

6 The list of prize monies is totalled as £4/14/0, which is 6d short.

7 Information about these men is from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography website (www.oxforddnb.com) and also www.thepeerage.com

8 Eddowes's Journal, 30 October 1850, at the Shrewsbury Archives.

9 The ages were thus Under 8 and Under 15, not Under 7 and Under 14 as given in David C. Young's The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival. I only mention this as both George Thomas (winner) and Thomas Brookes (second) were already 7 years old when they won their awards.

10 Early nineteenth century accounts of races nearly always refer to both the preliminaries and the final as 'heats'.

11 As reported, this race seems to have been decided upon at the spur of the moment, as according to the accounts two prizes of ten shillings each had already been allocated to the winners of two other Adult Footraces. These, however, are not recorded in Eddowes's Journal at all.

12 There has been a tendency recently to describe these original games as basically Olympic with a few local embellishments, but I fear the evidence suggests exactly the reverse. It is significant, for example, that only the youngest winners were given laurel (later olive) wreaths. Not until 1858 did Brookes explicitly compare these games with those of antiquity (in the course of which repeating the common but spurious connection between the old English game of quoits and the Greek discus), in one of his introductory orations.

13 The Shrewsbury Chronicle, 12 September and 3 October 1851, at the Shrewsbury Archives.

14 From the first Minute Book of the Olympian Class of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society, at the Wenlock Olympian Society Archives.

15 From the minute book of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society, Established 1841, a pale brown quarto minute book in Brookes's handwriting (WARS/1/1) at the Wenlock Olympian Society Archives.

16 Eddowes's Journal, 29 September 1852, at the Shrewsbury Archives.

17 These local conditions were somewhat arbitrary, and at the same games different events might be restricted to residents of the Parish, the Borough, the County, or to people living within five or ten miles of the Town Hall. However only a Hurdles and a Footrace (usually the 880 yards) were advertised specifically as "open to all England." This may have been to attract famous pedestrians to Wenlock, and thus increase the attendance at the games, without detracting from their essentially local emphasis.

18 A rough overview of rural sports events in the nineteenth century can be established by entering one or more of these terms into the search engine of the British Library's Nineteenth Century Newspaper archive at www.newspapers.bl.uk and noting what turns up.

19 STRUTT, Joseph, op.cit.

20 AINSWORTH, William Harrison, The Star Chamber, London, 1854.

21 From various Ainsworth genealogies, no connection can be made at all, although Samuel could have been a second or third cousin.

22 SCOTT, Walter, Ivanhoe, Edinburgh, 1819.

23 AINSWORTH, William Harrison, Windsor Castle, London, 1842.

24 YOUNG, David C, The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival, John Hopkins University Press, 1996. Young slightly romanticises this letter, which was printed in The Times on 24 September. It may have been its publication in Eddowes's Journal which caught Brookes's eye, however, as that was the version he cut out and kept.

25 The Minute Book shows a total subscription of £30 9s in 1857, £34 in 1858, and £96 5s 2d in 1860.

26 SLANEY, Robert A, An Essay on the Beneficial Direction of Rural Expenditure, London, 1824, found at www.archive.org

27 DALMENY, Lord (Archibald Primrose), Address to the Middle Classes upon the Subject of Gymnastic Exercises, London, 1848, found at www.archive.org

28 A detailed account of Lord John Manners and the Young England Movement can be found in WHIBLEY, Charles, Lord John Manners and his Friends, Edinburgh, 1925.

29 From an article in the Birmingham Journal, quoted in The Hull Packet and East Riding Times, 6 September 1844, in the British Library's newspaper collection at www.newspapers.bl.uk

30 Details from HUDSON, James William, The History of Adult Education, London, 1851, at books.google.co.uk

31 As reported in The Morning Chronicle, 2 September 1844 (first meeting), The Daily News, 16 April 1846 and 12 April 1849, etc. until the demise of both Institute and President in 1859 (reported in The Birmingham Daily Post, 2 May 1859). All these papers are in the British Library's newspaper collection at www.newspapers.bl.uk

32 Described in The Morning Chronicle, 5 September 1845, in an article credited to the Worcester Chronicle. The Daily News of 16 April 1846 refers to a "gala-day" that took place "two years ago", but may refer to the same event (www.newspapers.bl.uk).

33 As reported in The Liverpool Mercury, 1 October 1852, found in the British Library's newspaper collection at www.newspapers.bl.uk

34 Punch, Vol. XXIII, July to December, 1852, London, 1853, online (as Punch, Volumes 22-23) at books.google.co.uk. The issue contains several articles making fun of Lord John Manners and the Young England Movement.

35 Details from John ROBERTS, Askew, Wynnstay & the Wynns. A Volume of Varieties, London, 1876, partially online at books.google.co.uk

36 The Eglinton tournament is thoroughly researched in ANSTRUTHER, Ian, The Knight and the Umbrella: an account of the Eglinton Tournament 1839, Sutton Press, 1963, and John Fane's pastiche is reported in Jackson's Oxford Journal, 15 August 1840, found in the British Library's newspaper collection at www.newspapers.bl.uk

37 Biography from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography website, www.oxforddnb.com, and the National Library of Wales Welsh Biography Online at wbo.llgc.org.uk. Details of the Manchester Art Exhibition from www.newspapers.bl.uk

38 Details of the arms can be found in BURKE, Sir Bernard, The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, Harrison & Sons, London, 1884, online at books.google.co.uk