

ROBERT DOVER, Dr WILLIAM BROOKES AND ALL THE OLYMPIC GAMES

INTRODUCTION

Sport contains common elements of now ritualised behaviour which can be explained best in terms of the hunter-gatherer cultures existing up to 10,000 years ago. In this respect all sport can claim pagan roots, but it has really been a continual process of adapting old actions to new situations, and it is dangerous to imply any continuity in the ideas. Despite the modern developments, sport is not necessarily competitive. Lewis Carroll's "Dodo's Caucus Race" where everybody won and all had prizes was intended to shock Victorians into a wider realisation. The older meaning included fun, entertainment and games, and embraced the Morris when it appeared. The Olympic ideal of the classical era had brought the local Greek cultures together, as expressed in a number of annual festivals, and they grew to encompass many athletic, equestrian and artistic events. The rediscovery of the classical world from the late Renaissance onwards led to the recurring interest in them in modern times. There have been three great contributors to the movement, Robert Dover in the Cotswolds, Dr William Brookes at Much Wenlock and Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the inspiration of the Modern Olympiads, whose achievements over a three hundred year span are linked, and who are in danger of being forgotten.

DOVER'S LIFE

Robert Dover was born in 1582, seventeen years after Shakespeare, the son of John Dover of Great Ellingham, in a family of Norfolk minor gentry, a number of whom moved to the area between Chipping Campden and Evesham. He studied at Gray's Inn during 1604-5. In Elizabethan times the Inns of Court had emerged as combined finishing schools and law academies for the sons of gentry and wealthy yeomen. By 1610 he had become the second husband of Sibella Sanford of Stow-on-the-Wold, the daughter of Rev. William Cole (d.1600), a Dean of Lincoln, and the widow of a Bristol merchant. At first they lived at Saintsbury, over the Cotswold edge from Chipping Campden, where Dover, a barrister, practiced as an attorney. It was reputed that Saintsbury then had a cherry fair and that also the local plums were made into a drink called "Plum Jerkin". In 1613 they were in Chipping Campden, and then at Childwickham, just west of Saintsbury, where, amongst other things, from 1623 he was Steward of the Manor of Wickhamford, a little to the north near Evesham. They had two daughters and two sons, one of whom died after four months. He was probably created a Royalist Army Captain during the Civil War, despite his age. Robert was buried on 24th July 1652 at Barton-on-the-Heath where his son John lived, just east of Moreton-in-the-Marsh, and his wife was buried in June 1653.

A grandson, Dr Thomas Dover (1660-1742) was born in Warwickshire, who invented "Dover's Powders", a mixture of opium, ipecacuanha and sulphate of potash, a sedative still in use in the nineteenth century. However his published works contained little else of value. He had an exaggerated estimation of the value of mercury as a remedy. Unexpectedly he went as second in command on a privateering voyage around the world, starting in August 1708, which rescued shipwrecked Alexander Selkirk from Juan Fernandez on 2nd February 1709,

where he had been for four years and four months and who then lived on at home for another thirteen years, becoming the model for Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe". Defoe met him at the home of the daughter of Nathaniel Wade, who had gained a pardon after being an officer in the Monmouth Rebellion by writing the narrative of that event from the inside for James II.

THE BEGINNING OF THE COTSWOLD GAMES

Dover and his friends of the Inns of Court and of the stage in Jacobean London, in so far as they had any aim beyond that of just enjoying themselves, sought to keep the imagined lingering spirit of rural medieval England alive by both reviving and modernising its country sports and pastimes. This meant for them at that period relating these to classical mythology and the Renaissance culture, whilst also linking them with the English throne and the King's Protestant Church. Dover's interpretation of the "Olympick Games" probably opened about 1612. The games were in effect a counter against the growing influence of Puritanism. Dover probably took over games which had been celebrated for some years as a joint Whitsun Ale and jollification for the parishes of Weston-sub-Edge and Chipping Campden. Their boundaries met along the ancient path, now the Cotswold Way, passing near the Kiftsgate stone, once the meeting point for the neighbourhood's Saxon Hundred Moot and at which the Kings of England were proclaimed locally. By attempting to combine the then ideas of the Olympic events of ancient Greece with the activities of the Cotswold Whitsun Ales and by enlarging and organising the games, Dover created a unique festival which made Chipping Campden famous throughout the Shires and even at Court.

The general policy of King James I was confirmed in his *Book of Sports* of 1618 and reaffirmed in 1633 by Charles I,

And as for our good people's recreation; our pleasure likewise is that after the end of Divine Service, Our Good People be not disturbed or letted or discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as Dancing, Archery, Leaping, Vaulting, or any other harmless recreations; nor from having May games, Whitsun Ales, and Morris dances; and the setting up of Maypoles and other sports therewith used, so as the same shall be had in due and convenient time, without impediment or neglect of Divine Service.

Dover's friends included Ben Johnson and his sometimes employer Endymion Porter, born at Mickleton in 1587. After living in Spain between 1606 and 1612 he was able to purchase the old family estate at Aston-sub-Edge but he seldom stayed there. Porter was a poet and a groom of the bed chamber to the future king and as a great patron of the Arts played an important part later in forming Charles I's great collection of pictures. Through his position at Court in the service of the half brother of George Villiers, the King's favourite, later created Duke of Buckingham, Porter was able to obtain not only James' leave for the Games with the help of Sir Baptist Hicks, but was given a hat and feather and ruff and other clothes cast off by the King, and in these Dover used to dress when he rode on the hill officiating at the games.

They were supposedly attended by nobility and gentry from as far away as sixty miles. It is believed that Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Charles I's to be famous

nephew, attended the Cotswold Games in 1636, when aged eighteen, attended by Endymion Porter. Sir Baptist Hicks was a financier to whom James I and his court were nearly all deeply in debt. His mother is said to have invested in Drake's Round-the-World voyage. Hicks came to Campden in 1610 soon after it had received its new royal charter, buying the manor, and as owner of Weston Park on the edge above Saintsbury he provided Campden with major new buildings, such as the manor house, the market hall and the almshouses. Finally he was created Viscount Campden of Campden and Baron Hicks of Ilmington in 1628 the year before he died aged 78 at the Old Jewry in London, which is by the Guildhall, and, surprisingly, not at his London home of Campden House in Kensington.

THE "ANNALIA"

There was a steady literary interest in the games partly because of the possible connection with Shakespeare but also because of the book *Annalia Dubrensis* containing thirty three poems which was written over a number of years, with contributions from poets, friends, relatives and admirers of Dover of which the first edition was published in 1636. It was reprinted by his grandson Thomas Dover in 1736, but then not again until 1877 by Dr A B Grosart and then in 1878 by E R Vyvyan. However except for the following there is very little mention of dance or of any form of the Morris.

William Durham (1611-1684), third son of John Durham of Willersey, two miles from Dover's Hill, and who married the daughter of the Royalist vicar of Campden in 1633.

"In honour of the place they leape on high,
and friske and dance for joy they are so nigh!"

"And maydens measured galliards on the greene"

"Which from the woods did walke into the plaine,
There dance a jig, and so return againe."

Thomas Randolph (1605-1635), poet and playwright.

"From this same beech to yonder mulberry,
A second leapt, his supple nerves to try,
A third was practising his melody,
This a new jig was footing."

"These teach that dancing is a Jezebel
and Barley Brake the ready way to hell,
The Morrice, idols; Whitsun-ales can be
but profane relics of a Jubilee!"

"The country lass, although her dance be good,
Stirs not another's galliard in the blood."

THE COTSWOLD GAMES UNDER DOVER

The Games were began on the Thursday of Whit week and lasted two days. Dover usually opened them by riding up on his white horse to a portable pivoted castle built of boards that he had had erected on the hill and then firing off a salvo from the castle's mimic battery of small cannons. Prizes of value were given, such as a silver "salt" for the racing in the form of a model of the castle. Yellow silken ribbons known as "Dover's Favours" were sold and worn as a compliment. Anthony a Wood in *Athenae Oxonienses* in 1691 said that five hundred of the gentry wore such favours the year after one celebration. At this time the whole of the top of Dover's Hill, known as Kingcombe Plain until the nineteenth century, was unenclosed land, a great flat open plateau of five hundred acres within the parish of Weston-sub-Edge but extending south towards Broadway. It was ideal for the steeple chasing that was becoming fashionable and which throughout the Games' history remained the major attraction. Shakespeare's much quoted words from the *Merry Wives of Windsor*,

... How does your fallow greyhound, sir? I heard say he was outrun
on Cotsall ...

might well refer to Dover's Games as they appeared in the first folio edition of 1623, but had not been in the quarto of 1602. The games could have continued no later than 1643, as they were halted, possibly at the instigation of Campden's puritan minister, William Bartholomew. The early Civil War battle at Edgehill in October 1642 was less than twenty miles away. The antiquary and diarist Richard Symonds (1617-1692) writing during the King's Army's retreat from Evesham to Oxford on 17th June 1644 said, in an account published by the Campden Society in 1859,

... Over the Cotswold Downes, where Dover's Games were ...

The last open battle of the Civil War was fought up the slopes of Dover's Hill at Saintsbury as the start of what became known later as the battle of Stow, on the 21st March 1646.

Robert Dover's surviving son John, was born in 1614, married in 1639, moved to Barton-on-the-Heath 1604-1, and died in 1696, having been a captain of horse under Prince Rupert during the civil war and a captain of the local militia for a period after the Restoration.

THE REVIVAL OF THE COTSWOLD GAMES

The Rev. William Thomas recorded about 1730 that in Ilmington there was also still kept an annual feast on 21st September, incidentally known as St Matthew's day, set up by the "mobbish" people for wrestling and other masculine exercises from about the year 1650.

The Campden Games were revived again after the Restoration of 29th May 1660, although the actual year is unknown, and they continued with varying degrees of popularity and success for nearly two hundred years until 1852, when, largely by the influence of Canon Bourne the rector of Weston-sub-Edge, they were finally stopped.

In the Gloucester Journal of May 1725 there is an advertisement for the Games mentioning wrestling, back-sword, and men and women dancing jigs for prizes of shoes.

In 1736 the parson of Stow-on-the-Wold complained in *A Serious Dissuasive Against Whitsun Ales*,

These sports are attended usually with ridiculous gestures and acts of folly and buffoonery, but children's play, and what therefore grown-up persons should be ashamed of ... What I have now been desiring you to consider as touching the evil and pernicious consequences of Whitsun Ales among us doth also obtain against Dover's Meetings and other noted places of publick resort of this nature in the country.

William Somerville (1675-1742), a highly cultured gentleman published in 1740 his poem, *Hobbinol, or the Rural Games*. Its main interest is the vivid description it gives of the atmosphere of Dover's Games.

In 1773, the Rev. Richard Graves "the younger" (1715-1804) poet and novelist of Mickleton, aged 57, published *The Spiritual Quixote* (reprinted by OUP in 1967) a satire on the Methodists of his day drafted about 1758 . Graves imagines his hero Wildgoose and his rural friend and assistant Tugwell, setting out to convert the world and very early in his mission going to Dover's Games. The account of the scene gives an idea of the taste and flavour of an eighteenth century country gathering, being no better or no worse than any other.

They now approached the place of the rendezvous, where the revel was held; which was a large plain on the Cotswold-hills. Their ears were saluted with a confused noise of drums, trumpets, and whistle-pipes; not those martial sounds, however, which are heard in the field of battle; but such as those harmless instruments emit, with which children amuse themselves in a country fair. There was a great number of swains in their holiday-cloaths, with their belts and silk handkerchiefs; and nymphs in straw hats and tawdry ribbands, flaunting, ogling, and coquetting (in their rustic way) with as much alacrity, as any of the gay flutterers in the Mall.

A ring was formed about the wrestlers and cudgel-players, by the substantial farmers on their long-tailed steeds, and two or three forlorn coaches [were] sauntering about with their vapourish possessors: who crept out from their neighbouring seats - to contemplate the humours of these aukward rustics, and waste an hour of their tedious month in the *country*; where (as a great modern observes) *small matters serve for amusement*.

... they were refreshing themselves ... when the company began to divide; and proclamation was made, that a holland shift, which was adorned with ribbands, and displayed on a pole, was going to be run for; and six young women began to exhibit themselves before the whole assembly, in a dress hardly reconcilable to the rules of decency.

... a shrewd young carter (with a silk handkerchief about his neck) ... thinking that this harangue would spoil the diversion, which they were now intent upon, he threw the rind of an orange at the orator's head. Another levelled a piece of horse-dung (with an unlucky dexterity) exactly into Tugwell's mouth ... Their example was followed by a great part of the company; who began to bombard then furiously with clods of dirt and horse-dung ... One of them titling up the form on which Tugwell was exalted, laid him sprawling in the moisture, occasioned by the staling of horses, or spilling of the liquor; where he lay wallowing for some time, being saluted with several bumps and jostles in contrary directions; which prevented his emerging from the slippery soil.

They met Morris dancers when near Gloucester as they retreated from the games.

Those who are acquainted with this sort of morrice-dance must know that they are usually attended with one character called the Tom Fool: who like the clown in the pantomime, seems to burlesque upon all the rest. His fool's cap has a fox's tail depending like a ramillie whig; and instead of the small bells which others wear on their legs, he had a great sheep-bell hung to his back-side. Whilst the company therefore were all attentive to the preacher, this buffoon contrived to slip the fool's cap upon Tugwell's head, and to fix the sheep-bell to his rump. Which [he] no sooner perceived, than his choler arose, and spitting in his hands, and clenching his fists, he gave the Tom-fool a swinging blow in the face. The Fool, having more wit than courage, endeavoured to escape amongst the crowd. Tugwell pursued him in great rage, with the sheep-bell at his tail; the ridiculous sound of which, forming a sort of contrast to the wrath in [his] countenance, caused a great deal of loud mirth amongst the company.

THE SLOW DECLINE OF THE COTSWOLD GAMES

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the games seem to have declined. Samuel Rudder, topographer, (d.1801) in *A New History of Gloucestershire*, of 1779, merely stated,

... there is still a meeting of young people upon Dover's Hill, about a mile from Chipping Campden, every Thursday in Whit week.

A similar sentiment is in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1797.

Dover's Games were no doubt still pretty rough and disorderly, but they were part of the eighteenth century way of life, and an important and essential part, as also were events such as the urban public executions at which large crowds of people of all classes gathered, without the control of constables, and before the police existed. The sports were drawn from, according to later advertisements, in alphabetical order, bull-baiting, card games and chess in the tents, cock-fighting, coursing the hare with greyhounds, basket handled cudgel, back-sword and single-stick bouts, dancing by women, football and handball, handling the pike, hunting the hare with hounds, leapfrog, leaping, music, pitching or throwing the bar or hammer, quintain, quoits, racing on foot and running in sacks, shin kicking, shovel-board, skittles, walking on hands and wrestling.

According to Miss Edith Brill, for shin-kicking the two contestants had iron plates on the toes of their boots and, holding each other by the shoulders with outstretched arms, kicked at each other's shins until one was obliged to give in. Contestants hardened their shins with malt vinegar and a blacksmith's hammer. The back-sword fighting was equally brutal, in a celebrated fight between Spyles of Mickleton and Nezy Plested of Campden, one man lost an eye and the other died from his injuries.

Although all this emphasises the sporting aspect, Sir William Denny (d.1676, a contemporary at Gray's Inn, suggested in his *Annalia* contribution that Dover had provided a "Homeric" harpist to give the Games an Olympic character and to attract the gentry.

In Campden the early nineteenth century continued as in the past with the slow revolving year and the annual event of Dover's Games, with its crowds, junketings and confusions. A poster exists from 1806 showing that they were chiefly conducted on the initiative of the Campden Innkeepers, notably William Drury of the Swan Inn, who appeared to be responsible for bookings, entries, stalls etc.

In 1818 the poster proclaimed,

The high estimation in which this truly laudable Festival is held (being so famed for the celebrated Olympic Games) is fully evinced by its having been the Admiration of every true and undesigning Briton for more than two Centuries, and is now patronised by the Noble Heroes of the present age, and by every well wisher for the prosperity of the British Empire.

That year's event included a back-sword match for twelve guineas, wrestling for a silver cup, a pony race for a handsome prize and horse racing for a sweepstake of five guineas each with thirty pounds added. The new world of piety, self-improvement and progress was yet to come!

Hunting, coursing and shooting and the annual Dover's Games were the recreation of the gentry and some of the larger farmers, although the district around Campden seems to have lost the fashionable repute that it had in the eighteenth century for sport and social interactions. Of the meeting held in 1826, *The Mirror* (No.197 of 27th May 1826) referred to the Games and a reply (No.199 of 10th June) wrote that,

... although it is not countenanced by persons of rank and consequence as it was some half century ago.

It is still a great holiday for all the lads and lasses within ten to fifteen miles of the place, and is attended by numbers of gentry and people of respectability in the neighbourhood.

The same writer described the Cotswold Morris dancers as,

... spruce lads sprigged up in their Sunday clothes, with ribbons round their hats and arms, and bells on their legs, and they were attended by a jester called Tom Fool, who carried a long stick with a bladder tied to