

= Cotswold Olimpick Games =

The Cotswold Olimpick Games is an annual public celebration of games and sports now held on the Friday after Spring Bank Holiday near Chipping Campden , in the Cotswolds of England . The Games probably began in 1622 , and have continued on and off to the present day . They were started by a local lawyer , Robert Dover , with the approval of King James . Dover 's motivation in organising the Games may have been his belief that physical exercise was necessary for the defence of the realm , but he may also have been attempting to bring rich and poor together ; the Games were attended by all classes of society , including royalty on one occasion .

Events included horse @-@ racing , coursing with hounds , running , jumping , dancing , sledgehammer throwing , fighting with swords and cudgels , quarterstaff , and wrestling . Booths and tents were erected in which games such as chess and cards were played for small stakes , and abundant food was supplied for everyone who attended . A temporary wooden structure called Dover Castle was erected in a natural amphitheatre on what is now known as Dover 's Hill , complete with small cannons that were fired to begin the events .

The Games took place on the Thursday and Friday of the week of Whitsun , normally between mid @-@ May and mid @-@ June . Many 17th @-@ century Puritans disapproved of such festivities , believing them to be of pagan origin , and they particularly disapproved of any celebration on a Sunday or a church holiday such as Whitsun . By the time of King James 's death in 1625 , many Puritan landowners had forbidden their workers to attend such festivities ; the increasing tensions between the supporters of the king and the Puritans resulted in the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642 , bringing the Games to an end .

Revived after the Restoration of 1660 , the Games gradually degenerated into a drunk and disorderly country festival according to their critics . The Games ended again in 1852 , when the common land on which they had been staged was partitioned between local landowners and farmers and subsequently enclosed . Since 1966 the Games have been held each year on the Friday after Spring Bank Holiday . Events have included the tug of war , gymkhana , shin @-@ kicking , dwile flonking , motorcycle scrambling , judo , piano smashing , and morris dancing . The British Olympic Association has recognised the Cotswold Olimpick Games as " the first stirrings of Britain 's Olympic beginnings " .

= = Origins = =

The first Olimpick Games were probably held in 1622 , organised by lawyer Robert Dover , although different sources give dates from 1601 until 1612 . Little is known about Dover . He was probably born between 1575 and 1582 in Norfolk , one of four children born to John Dover , and may have been admitted to Queens ' College at Cambridge in 1583 , leaving early to avoid swearing the Oath of Supremacy . Dover was admitted to Gray 's Inn on 27 February 1636 , and was probably called to the bar in 1611 , the same year he likely moved to Saintbury , near Chipping Campden , with his wife and children .

It is unclear whether Dover began the Games from scratch , or took over from an existing event , perhaps a church ale . The Games had the approval of King James , who in his book of advice to his son , Basilikon Doron (1599) , had written that to promote good feeling among the common people towards their king , " certain days in the year would be appointed , for delighting the people with public spectacles of all honest games , and exercise of arms " . Although there was at that time in England a growing admiration for the ancient Greeks , Dover may have been motivated by military rather than cultural considerations . His biographer , Christopher Whitfield , claimed that Dover combined ancient countryside practices with " classical mythology and Renaissance culture , whilst linking them with the throne and the King 's Protestant Church " . Dover believed that physical exercise was necessary for the defence of the kingdom . He may also have believed that the Games would bring rich and poor together , increasing social harmony , an ideal that might explain why the event captured the public imagination .

Endymion Porter , a member of the court of King James , had an estate in the village of Aston @-@

sub @-@ Edge , close to Dover 's home . Dover acted as Porter 's legal agent between 1622 and 1640 , and through him James sent some of his own clothes to Dover , " purposely to grace him and consequently the solemnity [of the Games] " . James may also have granted Dover a coat of arms , with the motto " Do Ever Good " , as claimed by Dover 's grandson , a claim that was rejected by the heraldic authorities in 1682 .

The Annalia Dubrensia (Annals of Dover) , a collection of poems praising Dover and his achievements in promoting and managing the Games , was published in 1636 . The contributors included well @-@ known poets such as Michael Drayton , Ben Jonson , Thomas Randolph , and Thomas Heywood . They saw the Games as revitalising traditional English social life , and they countered opposition from the critics of such events , who complained of " drunken behaviour and sexual licence " , by stressing the " peaceful and well @-@ behaved " nature of the occasion , and even praising the Games as " a gesture of loyalty to the king " . The Games had acquired their title of " Olimpicks " by the time the Annalia Dubrensia was published , a name approved of by Dover . It secularised the proceedings , while adding an air a gentrification to the sports by linking them with the Olympics of ancient Greece . Having been brought up in a Catholic family , Dover might well have been keen not to draw attention to religion , particularly if the Games had taken over from an earlier church ale .

= = Proceedings = =

The Games took place in a natural amphitheatre on what is known today as Dover 's Hill , then called Kingcombe Plain , above the town of Chipping Campden , in Gloucestershire . They were held on the Thursday and Friday of Whit @-@ Week , or the week of Whitsun , which normally fell between mid @-@ May and mid @-@ June . Dover presided over the Games on horseback , dressed ceremonially in a coat , hat , feather and ruff , donated by King James . Horses and men were decorated with Dover 's favours , yellow ribbons pinned to a hat or worn around the arm , leg , or neck . Tents were erected for the gentry , who came from the surrounding counties of Gloucestershire , Oxfordshire and Worcestershire , and food was supplied in abundance . The poet Nicholas Wallington wrote that :

He [Dover] spares no cost ; this also doth afford
To those that sit at any board .
None ever hungry from these Games come home ,
Or e 'er made plaint of viands , or of room .

A temporary wooden building was constructed each year , called Dover Castle , from which gunfire salutes were sounded during the competitions . Competitors were summoned to the hillside by the sound of a hunting horn , to take part in various sports . Mounted cannons were fired to begin the events , which included horse @-@ racing , coursing with hounds , running , jumping , dancing , sledgehammer throwing , fighting with swords and cudgels , quarterstaff , and wrestling . Prizes included silver trophies for the mounted sports , and perhaps also money for the other events .

The contests were refereed by officials called sticklers , from which the phrase " a stickler for the rules " is derived . Sticklers were so @-@ named because they carried sticks , with which to safely separate two fighting swordsmen . No scores or times are recorded for any of the events . Portable watches of the time were " rare , costly , and relatively unreliable devices " , but perhaps just as importantly " nobody in Dover 's time was much interested in sports record @-@ keeping or record @-@ breaking " .

Visitors from all strata of society attended , from agricultural labourers to the nobility , some of whom travelled up to 60 miles (97 km) to attend the Games . Prince Rupert attended in 1636 .

= = = Other diversions = = =

A harper dressed as the Greek poet Homer entertained the crowds , enhancing the classical Olympic theme . There was also a maze , known as a Troy Town , constructed from piled up turf with walls about 1 foot (0 @-@ 30 m) high , through which villagers would dance . Various games

were played for small stakes in booths and tents , including chess , Irish ? a game similar to backgammon ? and card games such as cent , a game like piquet . King James approved of card games " when you have no other thing ado ... and are weary of reading ... and when it is foul and stormy weather " , but he considered chess to be " too obsessive a game " .

The Games ended with a grand firework display , centred on the castle .

= = Controversy = =

In the 17th century many Puritans believed that the slightest action might lead to sin , and even to Hell if it was not repented . They frowned on festivities such as the Games as being of pagan origin , promoting immorality and drunkenness , and disapproved of any celebration on a church holiday such as Whitsun . A Puritan revolt over a 1627 " Bringing in the May " festival at Mount Wollaston in present @-@ day Massachusetts resulted in the expulsion of its organiser from the colony . King James , on the other hand , viewed Puritanism as a challenge to the authority of the monarch .

The fine clothes donated by the King , which Dover wore when he presided over the Games , were not just a fashion statement , but also a political one . The feather in Dover 's hat was a " flag of defiance to virtue " in Puritan eyes , and even the starch probably used in the washing of his ruff was evil , according to the Puritan writer Philip Stubbes . He described starch as " [a] certain kind of liquid matter ... wherein the Devil hath learned them [non @-@ Puritans] to wash and die their ruffs " .

James was succeeded by King Charles I in 1625 . The new king reluctantly consented to an Act of Parliament " for punishing divers abuses on the Lord 's Day , called Sunday " . The Act restricted the activities that were allowed to take place on a Sunday , and prohibited any meetings of people outside their own parishes on Sunday . Many Puritan landowners went even further , forbidding their workers to attend any church ales , culminating in two Somerset circuit judges ruling in 1632 that " all public ales be henceforth utterly suppressed " .

The following year Charles reversed the judges ' ruling of 1632 . He produced a new version of James 's Book of Sports , which he ordered to be read in every church . In it he wrote :

We find that under pretence of taking away abuses , there hath been a general forbidding , not only of ordinary meetings , but of the feast of the dedication of the churches , commonly called wakes ... Now our express will and pleasure is that these feasts , with others , shall be observed , and that our Justices of the Peace ... shall look to it , both that all disorders there may be prevented or punished , and that all neighbourhood and freedom , with man @-@ like and lawful exercises be used .

The outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642 brought the Games to an end .

= = First revival , 1660 ? 1850 = =

The Games were revived at some uncertain date after the Restoration of 1660 . Dover had died in 1652 , and bereft of his influence , the Games became " just another drunken country festival " , according to an account written by the poet William Somerville in 1740 . By then the Games , known as Dover 's Meeting , were well established and once again quite popular , and included events such as backsword fighting . It is unclear whether the contestants fought with metal or wooden swords , but there is no doubt that very real danger was involved . During a fight at the beginning of the 19th century , one of the contestants was so badly injured that he died soon afterwards . The wrestling competitions had become shin @-@ kicking contests , with competitors wearing heavily nailed boots , sometimes with pointed tips . The poet and writer Richard Graves described the Games in his picaresque novel *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773) as a " heathenish assembly " . Somerville 's account of the 1740 Games describes a general riot in which " chairs , and forms , and battered bowls are hurled / With fell intent ; like bombs the bottles fly " . Graves dramatised the enthusiasm for the women 's race for a Holland shift displayed on a pole : " six young women began to exhibit themselves before the whole assembly , in a dress hardly reconcilable to the rules of decency " . By 1845 the Games were being organised by a local publican , William Drury , who paid £ 5 for the right to do so . He hired out space for stalls and booths , and presumably sold alcohol at

the event . The rector of Weston @-@ sub @-@ Edge , the parish in which Dover 's Hill is located , Reverend Geoffrey Drinkwater Bourne , claimed that up to 30 @,@ 000 people were attending the Games by then , and that the hillside was full of drunk and disorderly individuals . Bourne also claimed that :

From 1846 onwards , the games , instead of being as they originally were intended to be decorously conducted , became the trysting place of all the lowest scum of the population which lived in the districts lying between Birmingham and Oxford .

Such accounts may have been exaggerated however , as there are few reports of police being called to the Games , and no court records of prosecutions for drunkenness or fighting .

The staging of the Games depended on the existence of a suitably large area of common land , but by the mid @-@ 19th century much of England 's common land was being partitioned up and fenced off . Consent for the enclosure of the parish of Weston @-@ sub @-@ Edge was given in 1850 , signalling the end of the Games in 1852 . The parish 's 969 acres (392 ha) were divided among local farmers and landowners ; Reverend Bourne , who a few years earlier had complained so vociferously about the Games , received 63 acres (25 ha) .

= = Shakespearean connection = =

Some historians have suggested that the Games were alluded to in playwright William Shakespeare 's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* , and used that as evidence to suggest that Shakespeare may have seen the Games . But the allusion is not present in the quarto edition of 1602 , making its first appearance in the posthumous First Folio of 1623 , edited by Henry Condell and John Hemminges . It is therefore uncertain whether or not it was written by Shakespeare .

The first Shakespearean scholars to make a connection between Dover and Shakespeare were Samuel Johnson , George Steevens , Thomas Warton , and Edmond Malone ; historian Jean Wilson has commented that it required " quite imaginative leaps such as a hill referred to by Bolingbroke [King Henry IV of England] being the hill on which the games were held " . More recently , the historian and secretary of the Robert Dover 's Games Society , Francis Burns , has suggested that the wrestling scene in *As You Like It* " reflects the wrestling at the Games " .

Although Shakespeare may have been acquainted with Robert Dover , there is no evidence that he ever attended the Games .

= = Second revival , 1951 ? present @-@ day = =

Dover 's Hill was bought by the National Trust in 1928 , and until recently contained a monument to Robert Dover . The Games were revived for the 1951 Festival of Britain , but did not return to being a regular event until the Robert Dover 's Games Society was founded in 1965 . Except when exceptionally bad weather or an outbreak of foot @-@ and @-@ mouth disease has forced their cancellation the Games have been held each year since 1966 , on the evening of the Friday after Spring Bank Holiday , and attract thousands of visitors . An actor dressed as Dover arrives on horseback to open the games . Events have included the tug of war , gymkhana , shin @-@ kicking , dwile flonking , motorcycle scrambling , judo , piano smashing , morris dancing , and , in 1976 , poetry . After dusk a bonfire is lit , followed by a torchlight procession to the square in Chipping Campden , where the entertainment continues well into the night .

The British Olympic Association , in its successful bid for the 2012 Olympic Games in London , recognised Dover 's Games as " the first stirrings of Britain 's Olympic beginnings " . Writing in 1972 , the athletics coach and sports journalist Ron Pickering said :

The influence of English rural sports , and the work of William Penny Brookes and Robert Dover , have been significant in the development of the Olympic Games philosophy . Almost half the events in the Modern Games are historically connected to British rural sports . Therefore we have a certain arrogant claim and a responsibility to the development of the Modern Olympic Games .