

THE NATIONAL OLYMPIAN TRIUMVIRATE – The Third Man

By Don Anthony

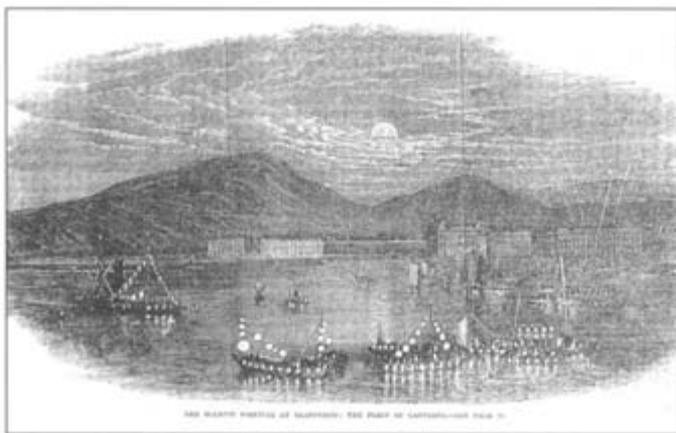
We now know that the National Olympian Association (1865-1883) [NOA] was organized by three outstanding Olympians:

- Dr. William Penny Brookes, who founded the Wenlock Olympian Society in 1865;
- John Hulley, Director (*Gymnasiarch*) of the Liverpool Gymnasium; and
- Ernst Georg Ravenstein, Honorary Director of the German Gymnasium (The German Gymnastic Society) [GGS] at the Turnhalle in London.

We also know that the intention of the NOA, at its foundation meeting in 1865 at the new Liverpool Gymnasium, was to make it "open to the world". John Hulley was elected Chairman. This intention was reinforced at the meeting in 1874, when the then Chairman, the Earl of Bradford, repeated that the NOA Games were "for all comers".

Furthermore, we know that Pierre de Coubertin, in his biography-obituary of Brookes – acknowledged these intentions – adding that the idea could not be brought to fruition except by the formation of an "international committee" – his *International Olympic Committee* [IOC]

Thanks to the detailed minute books, press cuttings, and notes of Dr. Brookes¹ (which are now available on the internet), held by his Society at Wenlock, we have confirmation of his role.



In addition to chairing the NOA, Hulley established a series of Olympic Festivals under the aegis of his Liverpool Athletics Club. These have been expertly chronicled by Dr Joachim Rühl.²

In a recent number of the ISOH Journal (Volume 9, number 1, January 2001, the Editor), I reported on further research into the "Mystery of John Hulley". Happily, more material has been unearthed about the "Liverpool Olympic Festival" held in



Llandudno in North Wales – the only Olympic Festival to be held outside England – in July 1866.³

That same year the first National Olympian Games took place in London. The swimming events at Teddington Lock on the River Thames; most gymnastics at the German Gymnasium (The Turnhalle); and athletics at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, S.E. London. The overall 'manager' was Ernst Ravenstein – the 'Third Man' in the NOA triumvirate. Brookes and Hulley made significant contributions.

Little was known about Ravenstein. Rumours had it that he was the son of August Ravenstein – himself a member of the "Friedrich Ludwig Jahn 'class'" from which the worldwide "Turner" movement grew. His Turnhalle had been bombed (by the Germans!) in the First World War. The German Gymnastics Society had gone into liquidation in 1916.

The building itself was the property of British Rail. Its outstanding wooden roof was thought to be the original of Kings Cross Station in London, and is now on the 'historic list' – which gives posterity some chance. However, the likely development of Kings Cross as the London end of Eurotunnel looms large and market forces might blight something as gentle as heritage in these barbaric times for English culture. A small partisan group exists in name – *The Ravenstein Sports Hall Trust* – and the latest good news is that the British Amateur Gymnastics Association is about to study the possibility of it becoming its London headquarters. Fingers crossed!

Hulley and Ravenstein also collaborated in the completion of a book, *Volks Turnbuch – a tribute to A. Ravenstein*, in 1867.



Both men were roughly the same age; they were kindred spirits. Their book – a copy of which is in the British Library (next door to the Turnhalle) – classifies gymnastics into: popular; school; military; medical; and spectacular. There was a little mention of “The Greeks and their festivals”. Thereafter both seemed to disappear from the limelight. We now know that Hulley travelled abroad; contracted a chest complaint; and died in 1875 at the early age of 42. **But what about Ravenstein?**



The library of the Turnhalle in London had more than 3000 books. There were “busts of F.L. Jahn and others”. When we ‘rediscovered’ the building in the 1980s we found a small Indian Club which seemed to be original. Apart from this there appear to be no artifacts; however, this year the Vice Chairman of the Society of Olympic Collectors [SOC] and member of ISOH, Mr. Bob Wilcock, acquired a copy of a postcard (see illustration) which refers to the contribution of the GGS to the 1908 Olympic Games in London. He is eager to put the search for historic material on a firmer footing.

This year too, the British Olympic Association’s National Olympic Academy was held at Lilleshall Hall – a national sports

centre – in Shropshire. It coincided with the opening of a permanent “Olympian Trail” at Wenlock, which includes the Oak Tree planted by Coubertin in 1890, during his visit to Brookes. Next door to Lilleshall Hall is Weston Park, the traditional home of the Earls of Bradford, whose NOA connections have been previously mentioned. The Earl in 1874 was President of the National Olympic Games held in Wenlock. During the Olympic Academy I visited nearby Wellington – now a central district of the new town Telford.

The purpose of my visit was to honour Ernst Ravenstein who, in 1868, had delivered a lecture on physical education, prior to the Third National Olympic Games – held in Wellington.

Local press reports had it as follows: “Before the band played a finale, Mr. Ravenstein, who throughout the whole proceedings had taken the lions share of the work, addressed the crowd. He said that the sports had now been brought to a conclusion and in every way they had proved successful (cheers). So far as spectacles were concerned – it had exceeded their most sanguine expectations. He hoped that when the Games were next held in Wellington there would be more competitions (hear, hear). He called for three cheers for the local organizer T.W Jones and there was great cheering.”

It was then reported that Mr. Ravenstein was thanked in generous terms.

He was “a gentleman who had come all the way from London to arrange their festival. Together with Clement Davies, Secretary of both the Birmingham Athletic Club and the NOA, he had admirably succeeded. He was a foreigner – a German. All Germans were now cousins it was supposed, and something more perhaps by the relationship of royalty (laughter and cheers). It was hoped they would give him a heart Shropshire cheer (great cheering)”. The band then struck up *God Save the Queen* and the crowd dispersed quietly.

During these Games the all-round winner in the First Games in London, in 1866, Mr Landsberger, “was the most successful amateur”. Landsberger was a leading member of the GGS. In the morning of the Games, in his lecture, Ravenstein was reported as follows:

“The benefits of physical education were commented on very favourably.... and he urged very strongly the establishment of gymnasiums, and the advisability of promoting a physical education in schools”.

The old Wellington Town Hall is in the vicinity of the nice-looking College of Arts and Technology today, and a stone’s throw from the new stadium of the Telford Football Club. Will both or either be inspired to create some testimony to this fascinating Olympic history, I wonder?

The BOA did do its bid by inviting Dr Holger Preuss of the University of Mainz, to give a keynote address at their academy. His theme was “The Sydney Olympic Games” and the content a summary of his recent book on the economy of these Games. He was reminded that he was only the second Saxon to speak in Shropshire on such profound Olympic matters!

It happens that there is another nice coincidence regarding the two German visitors. Ravenstein was born in Frankfurt in 1834 and died in Hofheim, in 1913, after a professional life in London, for sixty years. Hofheim is only ten kilometres from Mainz.

GYMNASTICS AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE annual festival of the German Gymnastic Society was held at the Crystal Palace on Saturday, and was attended by a large number of spectators, the majority of whom were Germans. The various sports and trials of skill and strength took place on the slope between the upper and lower series of fountains, and, the day being fine, the proceedings were watched with great interest, and many of the feats exhibited were loudly cheered. The gymnastic performances were generally very clever, and those on the fixed bar evinced great efficiency and highly delighted the spectators.

At the conclusion of the competitions the prizes were distributed by ladies on the Great Handel Festival Orchestra, Mr. B. G. Ravenstein, the president of the society, introducing each of the successful competitors with a few appropriate remarks. The winners

were, in the general competition, Mr. Henry Brooks, who obtained 55.8 marks, and won the laurel crown; Mr. H. Landsberger, who obtained 54.8 marks; Mr. Watts, who got 54 marks; and two other gentlemen. The prize for the long leap was taken by Mr. Balla, of Norwich, who leaped 17 ft. 3 in.; that for the high leap, by Mr. Brooke, who jumped 5 ft. 4 in. Mr. Phillipin won the prize for put-

ting the shot, "putting" (or throwing) a 36-pounder, to the distance of 20 ft. 3 in. For running the half mile Mr. Schultze, of the London Scottish Rifle Volunteers, got the special prize, doing it in 2 min. 3 sec. Messrs. Woodford and Watts took the general running prizes. The climbing prize was gained by Mr. Watts, who thrice ascended a rope 55 ft. long. These performances are creditable to

the German Gymnastic Society, which, at the beginning of this year numbered 1180 members, of whom 440 were Germans.

The race in snow-shoes on the turf, though not a portion of the programme of this society, afforded much amusement to the spectators at the Crystal Palace. We present an illustration of the scene.

Such facts – and many others, I have recently gleaned from the archives of the Royal Geographical Society in London. Having almost resigned from the research-task regarding the GGS, I remembered that Ravenstein had inserted the title "F.R.G.S." after his name in the joint book with Hulley. A "Fellow" of the Royal Geographical Society [RGS] should be listed, I thought. Hey, presto – there it all was – obituaries in English and German on a famous geographer – just like his father August. I am indebted also to Francis Herbert, Curator of Maps at the RGS, who responded to my first question – "Yes, I know much about him – we have material for you – I met his daughter about ten years ago!"

Not only Holger Preuss is now involved in the search. So is his Head of Department at Mainz: Prof. Dr. Norbert Müller. At the Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln Dr. Karl Lennartz and Dr. Joachim Rühl have also been alerted. Again – fingers crossed, please.



The last person privy to these new discoveries is Professor John Bale at the University of Keele – also on the doorstep of the Shropshire Olympian heritage events. He must be the world's only practising professor of sports geography. To stand astride both sport and geography gives him a stable starting position.

I do not want to over-anticipate what further research might reveal, but I do think that someone reared in the stable of FL. Jahn theories – and the philosophy of "Frei, Frisch, Fröhlich, Fromm" (Free, Healthy, Happy, Devout) – would have an inkling of what Olympism meant. Furthermore that this was demonstrated in the practices of the GGS in London where not only sports, but arts, especially singing and music, together with science and industrial attainments, were honoured. It should not be forgotten either that there were more than 33 nationalities represented in the GGS membership – and the English outnumbered the Germans.

The GGS hosted the embryo British national governing bodies for gymnastics, wrestling, weightlifting, and fencing, among others – and they were founder members of the AAA (itself a main founding body of the BOA). And, of course, that classes for women, encouraged by both Hulley and Ravenstein were light years ahead of their time. The teacher Oberholzer, from the Turnhalle, was later invited by Madame Bergman-Osterberg to help teach her girls at Britain's first fulltime College for Physical Education in London.

Against this must be stated the 'anti-german' feeling generated by the First World War – in England. The Royal Family changed its names from Coburg to Windsor, and from Count Battenberg to Lord Mountbatten. In the early sixties, I met a teacher of physical education at Northumberland Heath Secondary School, S.E. London, who was near retirement (at 65 years). He told me that, after the First World War, he was instructed, with all others, to abandon 'German Gymnastics' in his teaching. He said he had hidden the parallel bars under the school stage for some years, until it was respectable to take them out again!

What a pity 'German Gymnastics' was not known as 'Olympic Gymnastics' and how severe was this embargo on the development of gymnastics in Britain? No wonder one obituary reads: "Ravenstein was by birth a German – but a very loveable one!" He would have been glad to have died, in 1913, before that terrible war took place.

"Loveable" was matched by "Genial" in an obituary. Victorian press comments about the dress of the organizers of the First National Olympian Games in London was scathing in one case but about Ravenstein, coupled with appreciation of his work, was that he was "most simply attired – and affable".

To conclude, what does this new foray into the history of Ernst Ravenstein, show us:

He was born in Frankfurt on Main in 1834 "in an old Thuringian family".

He died March 13th, 1913 at Hofheim, at the age of 78 "in the Taunus mountains".

He was the elder son of the well-known mapmaker August Ravenstein.

Educated at the Frankfurt Gymnasium and the Städtisches Kunstinstitut; studied under the 'eminent geographer' August Peterman in London, where he emigrated at the age of 18.

From 1855 to 1872 he worked as a topographer for the War Office in London.

In 1858 he married an English lady (Welsh perhaps?) Ada Parry.

He also worked for the company G. Phillips as a geographer; this company no longer exists.

In 1909 he was awarded an Hon. Dr. (Philosophy) by Göttingen University (for his work on Martin Behaim and his globe – 1908).

In geography he is known for his expertise on immigration patterns.

He was "born on the edge of the SW German wave into the Rhineland and witnessed the immigration trends from Ireland to the United States of America and to Britain, and from the British countryside into the towns!"

His 'Laws' on these matters became – and still are – a valued text.

His contributions to cartography were highly valued; he made maps of Africa and India.

His second field of interest was exploration; in addition to explorations in Africa and India, he worked on North American topics and Russian explorations in the Far East.

He translated Vasco de Gama's first voyage (1888).

Climatology was another field of his expertise. It is said that he "sought to establish generalisations of worldwide application".

For years, I have laboured under the impression – delusion even – that E.G. Ravenstein was some sort of imported gymnastic teacher. I now take off my hat to honour a great scholar who was First President of the GGS from 1862 until 1871, and for many years also Honorary Director of the GGS and co-founder of the NOA. Such rich scholarship is fitting for an early Olympian. His contributions to Olympism seem to balance out the German Gymnastic tradition with that of the Swedish – Lingians, represented in the first International Olympic Committee by Victor Balck, Director of the Royal Gymnastic Central Institute in Stockholm.

¹ Obituary: "A typical Englishman – Dr. W.P. Brookes of Wenlock in Shropshire", in Review of Reviews, New York, 1895.

² "The History of the Liverpool Olympics in 19th Century England"; by Dr. Joachim Ruhl and Annette Keuser, Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln, Cologne, Germany.

³ See illustration: The Olympic Festival at Llandudno: The Feast of Lanterns. This four day Festival comprised athletics, fencing, gymnastics, boxing, wrestling, weightlifting, swimming, and sailing. The Olympic Festival opened with a procession, accompanied by band, and closed with a "Venetian Festival" and dinner-dance. Silver medals were awarded to the winners – bronze ones to runners-up. The Victor Ludorum, a Mr. Henderson from Liverpool and a corn merchant by trade, won one gold medal (the champion), five silver, and five bronzes!



A DATABASE OF OLYMPIANS – the Databasing of Olympic Athletes and Results and Considerations on a Style Sheet of Olympic Names

By Bill Mallon

With the advent of the computer age and the easy accessibility of databases, efforts are now being to create a complete database of the results of all the Olympic Games and of all Olympic athletes. The effort is going forth among several groups, with the JOC also involved. While this database requires numerous decisions to be made concerning the styles of usage for events, nomenclature of codes for sports, disciplines, events, sub-events, and phases, the major problem inherent in it is created by the difficulty in deciding the usage of the athlete's names. In the following I will discuss some of these problems and how they relate to the database, the format of the database, and suggest possible solutions. Much of this material has been reviewed and edited, with many suggestions incorporated from the following ISOH Members: Magne Teigen, David Wallechinsky, Arild Gjerde, Tony Bijkerk, David Foster, and Stan Greenberg.

It may seem trivial to even be concerned about the proper name usage but it most assuredly is not. One prominent American author of self-help books, Norman Vincent Peale, once wrote, "The most important word in any language, is a person's own name." My first Olympic book was co-authored with Ian Buchanan and entitled *Quest for Gold: The Encyclopedia of American Olympians*. At the 1984 track & field Olympic trials, I showed one of the first copies to several Olympians, among the first of which was the javelin thrower, Karin Smith. Her only comment to me, "But you spelled my name wrong." We had used the more common, but in this case, incorrect, Karen.

To me historians who demur that minor fact discrepancies are unimportant, while the arguments they build are important, overlook the fact that if there arguments are built upon an incorrect database of information, the arguments themselves may be invalid.

There are major discrepancies between the way names are listed in Olympic results and databases, and even between varying