



FROM BONN TO ATHENS, SINGLE AND RETURN. THE DIARY OF JOHN PIUS BOLAND, OLYMPIC CHAMPION ATHENS 1896; by Heiner Gillmeister; Academia Verlag Sankt Augustin, 322 pp; 217 illustrations; B&W and Coloured; ISBN 978-89665-7, €48.00. Reviewed by Karl Lennartz.

Once again, Heiner Gillmeister has published an amazing book. Until his retirement four years ago, this author and one of our members, taught English language and literature in the

Department of English, American and Celtic Studies, University of Bonn. In addition to his main areas of research, Old and Middle English literature with historical and structural linguistics, his avocation has been the history of sport. His speciality was ball games that led him to English-German sports relations in the latter half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

Sports experts first noticed Gillmeister's work in the mid-1980s with the publication of *Aufschlag für Walter von der Vogelweide*. This was followed in 1990 by his *Kulturgeschichte des Tennis* (completely revised and expanded as *Tennis, A Cultural History* 1998) and his *Geschichte der Olympischen Tennisturniere* 1993. More recently, he authored the first volume of *Golf in Deutschland* (2007), a four-volume history of the game in this country. In addition, he is the author of many biographical studies of sporting pioneers in sports history journals. Now in 2008, comes a very special study.

Who was Boland? He was a young Irishman descended from an affluent family. After studying law at Christ Church, Oxford, he continued his studies at the University of Bonn in the winter term 1895-1896 after which he prepared himself for the career of an attorney at the Inner Temple in London. It was from Bonn that he set out on his journey to Athens where he intended to watch the Olympic Games. In fact, in Athens, Boland was invited to enter for the Olympic lawn tennis event. In these games he not only won the singles, but also, partnered by the German Friedrich Adolf Traun, also triumphed in the doubles.

Soon after, as a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), representing South Kerry, he served as an MP from 1900 until 1918. He was one of the founder members of the National University of Ireland (1908), and chose its name. Boland was married to an Australian. Of their six children one daughter Bridget became a well-known writer, whereas another, Honor, became a member of the Irish Dail.

In his diary, Boland gives a graphic account of his studies at a German university and his journey to Athens and back. His intriguing description of the Olympic

Games not only sheds new light on the first Olympics of the modern era, but also makes for an intriguing read. Gillmeister will pardon me, I am sure, if I call him a 'foot-note freak'. It is exactly this feature of his book which finds favour with me and which will make it more valuable for readers. There is no detail likely to escape him. He has undertaken many time-consuming investigations in order to explain in a lucid way the places, the events and the roles of people making an appearance in Boland's journal. This is accomplished in no fewer than 562 end-notes that amount to 90 pages as opposed to 130 pages of the text proper. The book starts with a biography of Boland and ends with biographical sketches of Heinrich Borgass, Boland's host, Alfred Pazolt, Boland's American companion on his way to Athens, and finally Dr Georgios von Streit, one of the organizers of the Games.

Another fascinating feature of the book, apart from these notes, are the illustrations. Gillmeister has managed to unearth a great number of contemporary postcards, many of which are reproduced in colour. He has also traced photographs of people occurring in the journal in the possession of distant relatives. In addition, he has himself taken photographs of buildings of which neither postcards nor photographs existed.

Virtually no other Olympic event has received such extensive coverage as the Athens games. I have myself published three books on the subject, one with the assistance of Heiner Gillmeister. The theme would therefore seem to be finally exhausted, but it is not, as is now demonstrated by Boland's journal and its editor's comments. I got hold of a copy of it at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and by 3 a.m. I had read every single line of it!

Gillmeister discovered Boland's 137-page manuscript-diary as early as 1994, and one wonders why it has taken so long to come to print. The author repeatedly tried to prevail upon the Olympic Council of Ireland to show interest, but to no avail. Though Ireland can list few Olympic champions in its history, and Boland is without doubt the most important of those, that organisation was unable to lend its support, even its interest. Such an attitude is a noteworthy example of the historical ignorance of Olympic officials. In my capacity as head of the Carl and Liselott Diem Archive and President of the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH) I wanted to see to the publication of this book, but we simply did not have the means. Now Richarz Publishers of Sankt Augustin, a publisher of quite a few books dealing with sports history, has done the job and done it well. I believe that anyone interested in the history of the Olympics should secure for himself a copy of this book. ■