

On the trail of the 'Royal Reports' of 1912

By Jürgen Wagner

After the Games of the V Olympiad in 1912 in Stockholm the Organising Committee made great efforts to publish the voluminous final report in December of the following year in Swedish and in English. The journalist Eric Bergvall (1880–1950), a member of Sweden's 1908 bronze medal winning water polo team was entrusted with editing it.

In London he had been one of the co-founders of the International Amateur Swimming Association (FINA). At the 1912 Games he acted as President of the Swimming Commission. After that he was amongst other things, assistant secretary of the Swedish NOC (1913–24) and Director of the Stockholm Olympic Stadium (1916–45). In addition he invented the Bergvall system, designed to achieve fairer results than a simple knock out tournament format. This was used from 1920 onwards.

The Official Report of 1912, which modelled itself on its London predecessor, is an excellent work. The size alone speaks for the thoroughness of its content, as does the layout. The English version runs to 1117 pages, the Swedish 1068 – each with nearly 600 illustrations.

In the records of the Organising Committee, now kept in the Swedish State Archives, there is a series of documents which give information about the production and compilation of the report. Among these, is a three page letter dated 26th January 1913 from IOC President Pierre de Coubertin to the Secretary of the Organising Committee, Kristian Hellström. In this Coubertin sought to influence the organisers' the portrayal of the IOC and specifically how they depicted him.

In these documents, indications can also be found of the way the editorial team worked. Thus on 24th October 1912 the Organising Committee asked the British Olympic Association amongst other things, about the production costs and the number of copies produced of the 1908 report. From the reply of 5th November 1912 it can be assumed 4000 copies of the London report had been printed, whereupon the Swedes set the number of copies of their report at 6000 (Swedish) and 2000 (English).

The splendid volume however was not used only for administrative purposes, it was also freely available for sale. In a 16 page flyer the book was advertised, offered at prices of four US dollars (purchasing power today 103 US dollars), 15 Swedish crowns, 16 shillings and six pence or 16.80 German marks. Unfortunately, the take up for these volumes remains unknown.



For particularly distinguished individuals the Organising Committee had a personalised binding prepared with royal crown and monogram and with gilt edging. From an account of the bookbinders Beck & Son of 4th May 1914 I have found that only 24 copies of this 'Royal Report' were produced – four in Swedish, 20 in English.

The Swedish copies went to King Gustav V, Crown Prince Gustav Adolf, Prince Carl and Prince Wilhelm. In addition each of them received the English edition. The other 16 volumes were earmarked for the following heads of state: Kaiser Franz-Josef I (AUT), Kaiser Wilhelm II (GER), Emperor Yoshihito (JPN) and Tsar Nicolai II (RUS); Queen Wilhelmina (NED), the Kings Albert I (BEL), Christian X (DEN), George V (UK), Konstantin I (GRE), Victor Emanuel III (ITA) and Håkon VII (NOR); to the French Presidents Armand Fallières and Raymond Poincaré, US President Woodrow Wilson, Luxembourg's Grand Duchess Maria-Adelheit and Canada's Governor-General, The Duke of Connaught.

The special editions were handed over via Swedish legations; the letters of thanks are preserved in the State Archives. Thus the German ambassador informed the donors on 19th March 1914 that His Majesty "deigned to accept" the copy offered to him.

Only 16 nations are mentioned in the list, although 28 teams were present at the Games. So one wonders why no account was taken of the rest. It seems obvious that Australia and South Africa were considered as part of the Empire; Egypt a British Protectorate. Bohemia and Hungary were represented by Kaiser Franz. Finland was still a part of Russia, Iceland subject to the Danish crown. The remaining five – Chile, Portugal, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey – were probably considered by those in Stockholm as not so important, as there were represented at the Games by only a few athletes.

It remains to clarify where these rare 'Royal Reports' are to be found today. To date the author has only been able to track down three copies, and knows the whereabouts of a fourth. He would be delighted to hear about the whereabouts of any others. ■

Jürgen Wagner from Mainz, Germany, is a member of ISOH and of the newly founded international collectors' union Prolympto (see p. 29).
E-Mail: kj.wagner@arcor.de