

Philip Noel-Baker

by Don Anthony

Philip Noel-Baker won a silver medal in the 1500m athletics event at Antwerp. He was a spectator in 1908. Four years later he heard de Coucy Lafan preach the "Pax Olimpica" in Stockholm and was a competitor himself. In 1924 he was flag bearer for the British team and in 1948 he was the government minister responsible for the 2nd London Games.

In 1959 he won the Nobel Peace Prize – for his work on disarmament. He worked in the League of Nations and was a founder brain behind the UN. In 1960 he was elected President of Unesco's ICSPE – sports council.

He supported the Olympic idea in 1980 when attacks were made upon it. One year before his death, at Baden-Baden he received a three minute standing ovation for his AOB speech in which he said :

"If the IOC, with the help of Unesco, can bring sport for all to the whole world, especially the developing world, I will nominate them for the Nobel Peace Prize".

When critics suggested that the Olympic Games were too big Philip countered with the statement

"No Olympic Games yet has cost as much as the petrol used by military aeroplanes, in all countries, in one day!".

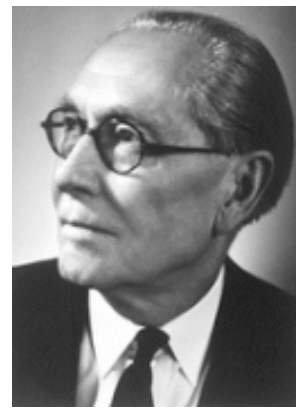
He would have been preaching the same message with even more force today.

In the first World War he served in the Friends (Quakers) Ambulance Unit in Italy. For "bravery in battle" he received Italy's highest medal; pity then that Turin 2006 did not honour this. After marriage he added Noel to Baker as his family name. A Noel ancestor, with Lord Byron, bought a property in Greece – Achmetaga – Prokopi. It still exists. His room there is still treasured and kept as it was in his working days; pity then that his name was not truly honoured in Athens 2004. His academic studies began at Harverford, USA in 1907; perhaps next year the USOC will note this. His father Allan Baker was a Canadian Quaker; perhaps Vancouver 2010 will note this.

In London 2012 I hope – as a centenary gesture – a Peace Sanctuary will be part of the Olympic Park to celebrate him – and all other friends of Olympism who have worked for peace and friendship among nations. Already oaklets from the 1890 Oak planted by Coubertin during his Wenlock, UK, visit are in the care of Kew Gardens London ready for such an occasion. The foundry which built the Great Paul Bell for St. Paul's Cathedral is on side to produce a replica to enhance a grove of oaks – remembering that the God of Olympism, Zeus, was born – in legend – in such a grove! Remembering too, that it was after a sermon in the London Cathedral – in 1908 – that Coubertin conceived the thought that the honour "is less in winning than in taking part". A thought we should consider with force today as Olympic matters are consumed with medal mania.

Further Reading

- Philip Noel-Baker and Don Anthony: Man of Sport, Man of Peace – Collected Speeches of Philip Noel-Baker, Olympic Statesman, 1889–1982. London, 1991: Sports Editions.
- David J. Whittaker: Fighter for Peace: Philip Noel-Baker, 1889–1982. York, 1989: Sessions.



Biographical information

Philip John Noel-Baker
*1 November 1889
Hendon, London (GBR)
†9 October 1982
Westminster, London (GBR)

Olympic results

1912

Athletics, 800 m: eliminated in heats; 1500 m: 6th

1920

Athletics, 800 m: did not start semi-finals; 1500 m: silver medal