CAPTAIN ROBERT DOVER'S OLYMPICK GAMES (Issue 2)

Robert Dover was born 17 years after Shakespeare in 1582,son of John Dover of Great Ellingham,Norfolk.He studied at Gray's Inn 1604-5.He became the second husband of Sibella Sanford of Stow-on-the-Wold,daughter of Dr.Cole dean of Lincoln,in 1610.They lived at first at Saintsbury where Dover practiced as an attorney.They were in Chipping Campden in 1613, and then at Childwickham where he was Steward of the Manor of Wickhamford from 1632.He died in 1652 and was buried at Barton-on-the-Heath.He became a Royalist Captain in the Civil War. He had two sons.A grandson,Dr.Thomas Dover,rescued Alexander Selkirk in 1708 and invented "Dover's Powders" a sedative still in use.

Dover and his friends of the stage and the Inns of Court,so far as they had an aim beyond that of just enjoying themselves,sought to keep alive the still lingering spirit of rural medieval England by reviving and modernising its country sports and pastimes,which for them meant relating these sports to classical mythology and the Renaissance culture,whilst linking them with the throne and the King's Protestant Church.The Olympick Games opened about 1612.The games were a conscious protest against the puritanism of the age.Dover probably took over the games which had been celebrated as a joint Whitsun Ale and jollification for the parishes of Weston Sub Edge and Campden whose boundaries met along the ancient White Way near the Kiftsgate stone,the moot point for the Saxon hundred.By combining the current ideas of the Olympic festivals of ancient Greece and the Cotswold Whitsun Ales and enlarging and organsing the games,Dover created a festival which was unique and which made Chipping Campden famous throughout the Shires and even at Court.

The policy of King James was confirmed in his Book of Sports in 1618 and reaffirmed by Charles I in 1633.

> "And as for our good people's recreation;our pleasure likewise is that after the end of Divine Service Our Good People be not disturbed or letted or discouraged from any lawful recreation,such as Dancing,Archery,Leaping,Vaulting,or any other harmless recreations;nor from having May Games,Whitsun Ales,and Morris dances;and the setting up of Maypoles and other sports therewith used,so as the same shall be had in due and convenient time,withoutimpediment or neglect of Divine Service."

Amongst Dover's friends were Ben Jonson and Endymion Porter.Porter as a great patron of the Arts played an important part in forming Charles I's great collection of pictures. Through his position at Court in the service of the half brother of George Villier,the King's favourite and later Duke of Buckingham,Porter was able to obtain not only James' leave with the help of Sir Baptist Hicks but was given hats,ruffs and other clothes cast off by the King,and in these Dover used to dress when he rode on the hill,officiating at the games,which were attended by nobility and gentry from as much as 60 miles away.It is thought that Prince Rupert attended in 1636.

The games were opened on the Thursday of Whit week and lasted three days.Dover opened them by riding up on his white horse to a portable castle built of boards that he had erected on the hill and firing off a salvo from the castle's mimic battery of small cannons. Prizes of value were given and yellow silken ribbons were distributed as "Dover's Favours". Wood said that 500 of the gentry wore such favours a year after one celebration.At this time the whole of the top of Dover's Hill,then known as Kingcombe Plain,was unenclosed land,a great flat open plateau of 500 acres in the parish of Weston Sub Edge.Ideal for steeple chasing which remained the major attraction.The games also consisted according to adverts of bull-baiting,card games in tents,chess,cock-fighting,coursing,cudgel and singlestick bouts,dancing of women,football,handling the pike,hunting the hare with hounds, leapfrog,leaping,music,pitching the bar or hammer,quoits,racing on foot,shin kicking, shoval-board,skittles,walking on hands and wrestling.The games continued till 1643,when they were stopped,probably at the instigation of Campden's puritan minister,William Bartholomew.The last open battle of the civil war was fought up the slopes of Dover's Hill. The games were revived again after the Restoration,29th May 1660,and continued with varying degrees of popularity and success till 1852 when largely by the influence of Canon Bourne,the rector of Weston Sub Edge they were finally stopped.

William Somerville,a highly cultured gentleman published his poem "Hobbinol,or the Rural Games" in 1740.Its main interest is the vivid description it gives of Dover's Games.In 1772,Richard Graves the younger,of Mickleton,published "The Spiritual Quixote" a satire on the Methodists of his day(reprinted OUP 1967).Graves imagines his hero setting out to convert the world and going to Dover's Games.The account of the scene gives a good idea of the taste and flavour of an 18th century country gathering,no better and no worse than any other.Towards the end of the 18th century the games seem to have declined.Rudder in "A New

History of Gloucestershire",1779,merely said "there is still a meeting of young people upon Dover's Hill,about a mile from Chipping Campden,every Thursday in Whit week".The games were no doubt still pretty rough and disorderly,but they were part of 18th century life and an important and essential part,as also were events like the public executions at which large crowds of people of all classes gathered.

In Campden at the start of the 19th century the past was still present,symbolised by the slow revolving year and the annual event of Dover's Games with their crowds and junketings and confusions.A poster exists from 1806 showing that they were chiefly conducted on the initiative of the Campden Innkeepers.The new world of piety,self-improvement and progress was yet to come.Hunting,coursing and shooting and the annual Dover's Games were the recreation of the gentry and some of the larger farmers although the district around Campden seems to have lost the fashionble repute it had in the 18th century for sport and social intercourse.Of the meeting of 1826 the Mirror (No.199) wrote that it was still a great holiday for all the lads and lasses within 10 to 15 miles of the place,and is attended by numbers of gentry and people of respectibility in the neighbourhood.The same writer described the morris dancers as "spruce lads sprigged up in their Sunday clothes , with ribbons round their hats and arms,and bells on their legs,and they were attended by a jester called Tom Fool,who carried a long stick with a bladder tied to it,with which he buffetted about to make room for the dancers,while one of the best looking of the men was selected to carry a large plum cake,a long sword run through the middle of it,the cake resting on the hilt.On the point of the sword is a large bunch of ribbons with streamers, and a large knife stuck in the cake,and when the young man sees a favourite lass he gives her a slice."

The coming of the railway was an event which caused much local disturbance.The intrusion of large numbers of "navigators" brought a fresh element of disorder and lawlessness into the district.The shops,public houses and bookmakers benefited but Dover's Games became more and more rowdy and were attended by larger and larger crowds.Grosart in the introduction to his edition of Annalia Dubrensia of 1877 said that during the five years (1846-52) that Mickleton Tunnel was in progress a body of navvies converted the gathering into a riotous and dangerous assembly.With the opening of the railway to Wolverhampton and Birmingham in the spring of 1853 the games became more the resort of roughs and undesirables from as far away as the Black Country.From the beginning of railways excursions were run even if there was still a long walk by today's standards at the end of it.Vyvyan in his 1878 edition of the Annalia Dubrensia said that the games became the trysting place of all the lowest scum of Birmingham and Oxford.Sometime before 1851 the Rev G.D.Bourne,later Canon,the wealthy and powerful Rector of Weston Sub Edge from 1846 till 1901,who was also a magistrate,saw over 30,000 at one of the gatherings and was much concerned at the drunkenness and general licence that prevailed.To stop it an enclosure act was obtained with the help of the Earl of Harrowby in 1853-4 for the parish.The hill was divided into fields leaving no space big enough for the crowds or the steeplechases or athletic events.The last official meeting was probably in the summer of 1852.

The games had not only occupied Dover's Hill.In Campden there were cock fights,plays and balls and a wake on the Saturday with booths,stalls and roundabouts.By 1887 this had expanded to be known as Scuttlebrook Wake,a festivity that continues today on the Saturday after the Spring Bank Holiday. A part of the hill became the property of the National Trust in 1926.The old custum died hard for much later in the 19th century there were still gatherings of young people for sports and games either on what there was of open space or on the Mile Drive which was probably part of the old race course.

The advertisment for 1852 mentioned dancing for ribbons but this was unlikely to have been a morris competition.However the morris was still present in the 1850's.There was a meeting at Stow beforehand for sides to compete for the right to dance on Dover's Hill at which the winning side would be able to sell the yellow Dover's favours.At one of the last celebrations the team from Guiting Power competed with four other sides,Sherborne among them as to who should have the right to stay on the Hill for the day and won the contest. The mss history of Mr.Horne of Chipping Campden,written 1898,said that the last year the meeting was held the morris dancers came from Longbrough.The competition at Stow was so successful that it continued for years after its primary purpose had ceased.