

The London Approach to documenting the 2012 Olympic Games

Tim Harris, Assistant Director, London Metropolitan Archives; and Chair of the International Council on Archives Section of Local Municipal and Territorial Archives

Introduction

London hosted the Olympic Games for the third time in 2012. This paper seeks to show how the Games have been documented in London, what was different about the digital nature of the archives and how the documentary record has proliferated across a number of websites and institutions. In particular, the role that the City of London's London Metropolitan Archives played in promoting the history of the Games and the role City archives have played, and ensuring the legacy (sporting, cultural and physical environment) continues into the future. Each host city has its own approach, this was London's.

Background

London had hosted the Olympic Games in 1908 and 1948. There had also been several draft and proposed bids to host the Games through the Twentieth Century but a concerted push was made in the early years of the Twenty First Century to aim for the 2012 Games. With the added impact of massive funds from the National Lottery, a realisation of the importance of sport to building strong communities and a change in government thinking about regeneration through development the scene was set for a strong bid. It was very important to London as a world city and the new Mayor of London made it a high priority.

Even before the bid was submitted there was contact made at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) from the Government Office for London and the strategic Greater London Authority about the records management required for this new temporary organisation bidding to run the London Olympic Games. LMA, backed by the City of London Corporation, fed into the consultation both about record keeping but also about the proposed Cultural Olympiad involving museums, libraries and archives.

The Planning stage 2005-2012

The successful bid was announced on 6 July 2005. The very next day there was the worst mainland terrorist atrocity in the heart of London with over 50 people killed. The juxtaposition of these dates led to a huge determination and resolve amongst the citizens of London and the UK that the newly announced London Olympic Games should be a huge success. The Government appointed an Olympics Minister. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) was established to administer and the Olympic Delivery Authority

was entrusted to deliver the physical structures and infrastructure. Because of this central government adoption of the Games, the records of LOCOG, a Public-Private Partnership, were considered to be records of national government and that the administrative archives should be sent to The National Archive (TNA) at Kew rather than to the archive of the City of London, London Metropolitan Archives. This was a different approach to that taken by other Games, including Barcelona.

After the Games: Establishing the Archive and the Importance of Digital

The Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in London 2012 were considered a huge success with great advances in accessibility, huge media coverage and for the first time a lot of social media coverage bringing together Londoners, national and international visitors and volunteers who made everyone feel very welcome. There was a real buzz around London. All the pre-planning had been worthwhile. But what would happen after the games had gone?

How could the archives reflect the enormity of the occasion, both of the sporting activity and the Cultural Olympiad? The digital archive at TNA would take a long time to establish from the complex datasets; and a very successful website the Olympic and Paralympic Record helped bring together information and sources about the Games as an interim measure.

However, a lot of material proliferated elsewhere. The British Library was confirmed as the place where webpages concerning the Games would be kept as a living record of a huge amount of digital activity (which hadn't been possible in the 2008 games). Many institutions, including LMA, built their own collections associated with the Olympic Games. Links to these sites can be found on the TNA's Olympic and Paralympic Record (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk).

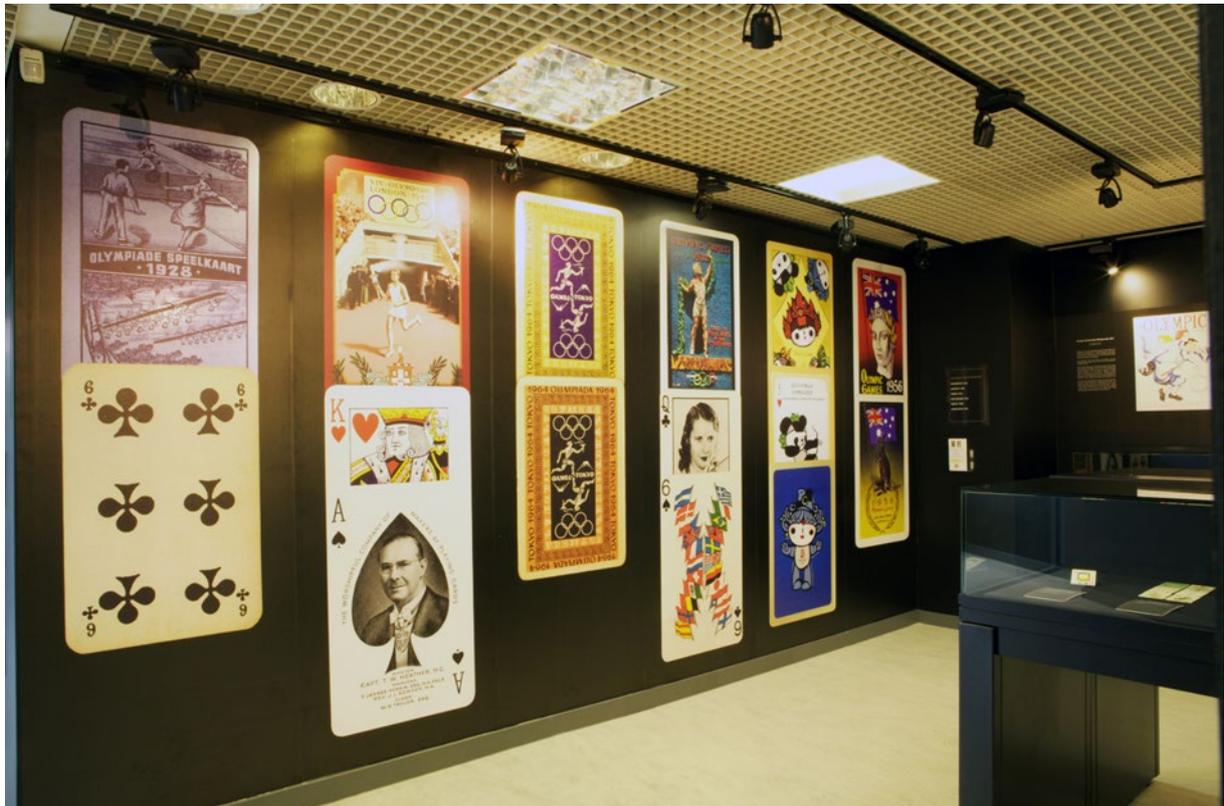
For the first time there were born digital records. Blogs and social media posts were still relatively new and information about how to preserve such digital records was still fairly new and untested. It also meant that there was a lot of duplication within and between institutions, fast changing real time websites with results and events recorded, and many links between websites. The technical expertise and resource needed to process the data was with the national institutions not the city archives.

What London Metropolitan Archives did

Being the host city archive it was important for LMA to be involved with the Cultural Olympiad, to assist in the administrative arrangements of being host city, to highlight the

importance of the archive record for the local citizens of London and to document the impact of the games on the life of the City of London.

It was able to do this through a number of events and activities as illustrated in this image of the exhibition of historical playing cards produced for Olympiads, entitled Sporting Aces.



Winning Endeavours was a pan-London project resulting in a website bringing together images and archives from London local archives onto a website to illustrate the 1908 and 1948 Olympic games held in London (www.webarchive.org.uk). LMA coordinated archive images illustrating all Summer Olympic Games and information concerning where the archives of each City's games are held (<http://sportingcities.org>). It was also able to arrange the hosting of an International Olympic Committee Exhibition of Sport and Art at Guildhall Art Gallery.

Even the physical archives helped in the effort to put on a good Games. A small portable travelling exhibition of original documents from 1908 and 1948 Games was used at official receptions for chefs de missions and other pre-and post- Olympic events. The archives of the British Waterways Board held at LMA were used extensively by engineers improving the canals and locks around the Olympic site, in order to allow materials to be brought to site by water rather than road through the congested city streets.

LMA thought it was important to capture the moment, the atmosphere and the excitement surrounding the Olympic Games. Part of that included participation in the Cultural Olympiad of special events, but part involved the collection of ephemera and mementoes of the Games through LMA members of staff and their extended network of friends and families. Over 1000 items are in this unique collection, collected in a way that was not standard practice but allowed for a closer reflection of life in London during the Games in 2012.



Legacy of the Games

The Olympic site is a continuing legacy itself with the renamed London Stadium hosting major events such as the Athletics World Championships, matches in the Rugby World Cup 2015 and hosting regular Premier League Football as the new home of West Ham United. The London Aquatics Centre, the Copper Box and the Velodrome are all well used community facilities as well as hosting tournaments. The legacy extends to improved community facilities and open spaces and exciting developments of new cultural landmarks near to the site. This development beyond the Games has been overseen by the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) and LMA has been in contact giving advice about future preservation of this major digital archive.

Conclusion

The 2012 London Olympic Games mark a digital watershed with the vast majority of its documentation being in digital format. The proliferation of digital sources held across several different archive institutions is an exciting digital opportunity, allowing us to do things differently, offering a wider share of archive legacy and with the facility to reflect divergent but complementary sporting, cultural and community views of the Games.

The importance of seminars like that held at Girona on 9 October 2018 is to raise awareness of the wide variety of sport archives that exist and the different approaches taken by cities and institutions. What we learnt in London was the significance of collaboration with partner institutions, sharing expertise and specialist knowledge in order to build a comprehensive yet manageable sporting archive, spread across different websites but with links to make searching more straightforward. We hope that this cooperation between archives will continue with the Tokyo Games in 2020.

Tim Harris

London Metropolitan Archives

tim.harris@cityoflondon.gov.uk