

THE 1908 OLYMPIC POSTER

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The 1908 Olympic poster design has long been lost – Neither the IOC Olympic Museum nor the British Olympic Association has a copy. The various “Olympic Poster” series of reproduction posters or postcards always show the programme cover for 1908, and Harvey Abrams (and others) go so far as to say that there was no official

poster for 1908. This is not correct. The minutes for the British Olympic Council for 6 June 1907 read:

“On the question of posters, which Mr. Kiralfy desired the views of the Council, it was decided that the system of competition was to be preferred to that of invitations issued to selected artists.”

Mr. Kiralfy was Commissioner-General for the Franco-British Exhibition, and it was the exhibition organisers, not the British Olympic Association who were responsible for publicity for the Games under the terms of the contract signed on 14 January 1907.

Unfortunately no published announcement of the competition has come to light, but at the BOC meeting of 21 October 1907

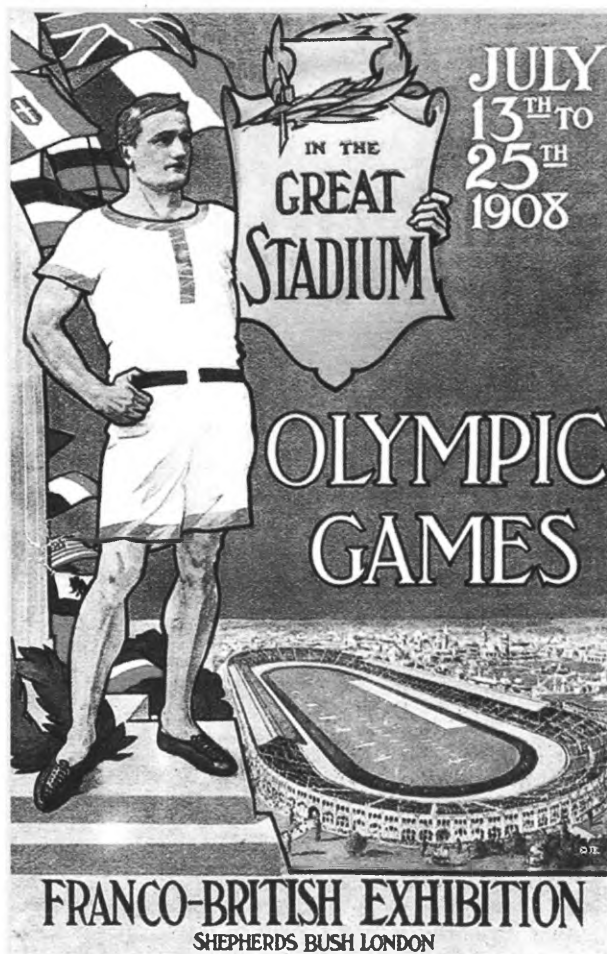
“the posters designed for advertising the Olympic Games were submitted by M. Kiralfy, and after considerable criticism it was decided that a new design should be obtained by competition.”

Again no public notice has come to light, but the BOC approved a design on 17 June, less than a month before the Opening Ceremony. The BOC minutes record that the design was submitted to the Council by the Art Committee. Council unanimously approved the design, the Art Committee were authorised to proceed, and it was agreed that

“the Council will pay a quarter of the cost of the poster provided it does not exceed £100.”

The minutes give no further information, and in particular the identity of the artist is not disclosed.

Although the design of the poster was lost, some information, a tantalising clue, was available from a postcard of the time showing two copies of the poster on



a hoarding by one of the entrances to the Franco-British Exhibition:

In 2006 the Museum of London announced a “Great Sale of London” as a major fund-raising exercise. People could “buy” or sponsor key years. 1908 was one of those years, and the image on the front of a folder advertising the Stadium was used to advertise that year. The image comes from a folder in the Kiralfy archive¹, is the same as that on the postcard, and so we now know the poster design. Two other copies of the image are known to be in private hands, one of them being from a paper bag in which were placed postcards bought from the kiosks in

the Franco-British Exhibition². No actual poster has been found, probably because they were made and belonged to the Exhibition organisers and not the BOA. ■

Notes:

- 1 See www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/X20L/objects/record.htm?type=object&id=474195
- 2 One of those image owners has given permission for the image to accompany this article. It is also used as the front cover of *The 1908 Olympic Games, the Great Stadium and the Marathon – a Pictorial Record* compiled by the present author, and is available as a postcard from marathon@societyofolympiccollectors.org

