



INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE

Historical Archives  
Olympic Studies Centre

## Lord Killanin

### *Fonds list*

Overview of the content of the archives concerning his biography, mandates and activities from 1952 to 1999

14 April 2011



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**Reference:** CH CIO-AH A-P06

**Dates:** 1952-1999

**Level of description:** Fonds

**Extent and medium:** 27.22 l.m. Text documents.

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### **Name of creator**

International Olympic Committee (IOC).

### **Administrative / Biographical history**

Michael Morris, alias Lord Killanin, was born in London on 30 July 1914, just a few days after the start of the First World War. His mother, Dora Wesley Hall, was of Australian origin, and his father, George Morris, was Irish. He had died at the front during the Great War, after which his widow married Colonel Gerard Tharp. With his wealthy background, Tharp enabled Killanin's family to live comfortably, as well as providing the children with a good education. Killanin was thus educated in history and the arts at the best schools. He first went to the famous Eton College, and then the equally well-known Sorbonne in Paris, and finally Magdalene College, Cambridge.

In 1927, when his uncle died, Michael Morris took the title of Lord Killanin, the name by which he was generally known from then onwards. His grandfather had first obtained the title of Baron Killanin, and Morris was the third to inherit this title, as well as the family estate in Spiddal, County Galway, Ireland, where he would spend a large part of his youth.

With his studies finished in 1935, Killanin started a career in journalism. In 1935, he worked at the *Daily Express* in London, and one year later at the *Daily Mail*. He then became head of the *Sunday Dispatch*'s political and diplomatic page, and was a war correspondent in China between 1937 and 1938. A keen sportsman, he also practised boxing, rowing, rugby and equestrian sports.

In 1939, Killanin interrupted his journalistic activities and became a volunteer in the British army. He took part in the Normandy landing as Brigade Major, earning him the Order of the British Empire. As soon as he was demobilised, in 1945, he married Sheila Mary Dunlop, who would give him three sons and a daughter: Redmond, Michael, John and Deborah.

After the Second World War, Killanin's career path was varied, including culture, sport and business. He occupied several administrative functions over the years, in management roles or on the boards of several Irish businesses, including Irish Shell Co., specialising in import and export. He also chaired several cultural or sports societies, such as the Irish Club. Furthermore, in the 1950s, he participated in the production of several films, notably *The Rising of the Moon* (1957), *Gideon's Day* (1958), *Young Cassidy* (1965) and *Alfred the Great* (1969). Finally, he penned some works, including the *Shell Guide to Ireland, Four Days* - a publication summarising the Munich crisis in 1938 -, a biography of the painter Sir Godfrey Kneller, and, later, an autobiography entitled *My Olympic Years*.

In 1950, Killanin was appointed President of the Irish Olympic Committee, a position he held until 1973. This appointment marked his official entry into the Olympic Movement. Two years later, he was elected as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Ireland. The difficult political situation in this country enabled him to develop his sense of diplomacy and his great ability as a mediator, as he tried to represent Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic within a single body. These two qualities were often needed later, mainly when he became IOC President in 1972, just after the official closing of the controversial Munich Olympic Games (OG).

Killanin remained as head of the IOC for eight years, during which he had to manage a number of difficult situations. He presided over the IOC during a stormy period for Olympism, which had to address several crises linked to international politics, as well as contemporary issues such as the commercialisation and professionalisation of sport or the increase in doping cases among athletes. Among these issues, there was the boycott of the 1976 OG by the African countries. These Games also had various organisational problems. We should also mention the sudden withdrawal of Denver's candidature for the 1976 Winter Games, which caused logistical difficulties for the IOC. Finally, there was the massive boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games, with the United States leading this movement.

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Everyone agrees that Killanin did, however, manage to lead the IOC through this tumultuous period, and that the running of the organisation was consolidated by the end of his presidency, notably on a financial level. After a fashion, the Killanin era thus enabled the IOC to ensure its durability.

Killanin retired as IOC President in 1980, but became Honorary President until his death on 25 April 1999.

#### **Immediate source of acquisition or transfer**

The fonds was received by the IOC Historical Archives in 1993, following the construction of the new Olympic Museum in Ouchy.

#### **Scope and content**

The fonds mainly traces the professional activities of Lord Killanin within the IOC, but it also contains some information on activities outside the framework of this organisation, mainly biographical. The fonds bears witness, above all, to Killanin's involvement in the IOC, first as a member (from 1952), then for his eight years as President of the institution (1972-1980), and finally as its Honorary President (1980-1999). Killanin's correspondence between 1951 and 1972, as an IOC member in Ireland, mainly provides information on the relations he maintained with the other IOC members as well as on his travels on Olympic business, notably related to Olympic protocol. The documents dealing with Killanin's presidency address various issues linked to the administration of the IOC, the organisation of the OG and the IOC's relations with the various members of the Olympic family. The fonds thus provides information on the IOC's relations with the City of Lausanne, its members, the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), International Federations (IFs) and various international organisations, including UNESCO, the UN and the Council of Europe. It also describes the organisation of the Summer OG in 1976, 1980 and 1984, and the Winter Games in 1980. Furthermore, it provides information on Killanin's participation in various IOC Sessions, commissions and congresses, and on some decisions taken during these meetings, notably changes made to the Olympic Charter. Finally, the fonds contains information on the trips made by Killanin between 1972 and 1979, mainly on the African continent.

The fonds contains correspondence between various natural persons and corporate bodies: the media, Monique Berlioux (the IOC Secretary General), IOC members, NOCs, IFs and other organisations linked, to a greater or lesser extent, to Olympism. It also contains circular letters, speeches, publications, administrative documents, lists of IOC members, biographical articles on Killanin and interviews with him. Finally, it contains travel reports, requests for NOC recognition, press articles about Killanin and information on events that took place during his presidency – including the boycott of the 1980 OG -, requests for autographs and photos, and numerous memos and telexes produced or received by Killanin.

#### **Accruals**

No

#### **System of arrangement**

The files are classified by subject, by document type or by activities in alphabetical order. The documents in the files are classified chronologically, from latest to earliest.

#### **Conditions governing access**

The documents are freely accessible, subject to the provisions established by the IOC to this effect.

#### **Language / scripts of material**

The documents are mainly in English and French. Some are in Spanish and German.

#### **Notes**

The content of this fonds, including the Olympic identifications, are the property of the IOC.

#### **Rules or Conventions**

Description complies with ISAD(G).

#### **Date(s) of descriptions**

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Last update: mars 11



August 2006