The Ancient Olympic Games began in 776 BC, in Olympia, Greece. They were held once every four years. Unlike today, the event was always held in the same place, and women had their own Games. In 393 AD, a powerful earthquake destroyed much of Olympia, and the Ancient Olympic Games came to an end.

Around 1500 years later, a Frenchman, Pierre de Coubertin, wanted to bring the Olympic Games back to life. In 1894, he invited his friends and colleagues to a meeting in Paris, France, and he told them about his plan to start the Modern Olympic Games. The group became known as the International Olympic Committee (IOC). New Zealand was one of the 13 nations represented at the signing of the IOC. Together, the Committee decided on some aims.

At the Ancient Olympics, awards were given to athletes, artists, musicians and writers, who all took part in the celebration. In keeping with this idea, Pierre de Coubertin created symbols and encouraged ceremonies, music and pageantry in the Modern Olympics. This combination of sports and culture makes the Olympic Games very different from other sports events.

Olympic Motto
In 1891, a friend of Pierre de Coubertin called Father Henry Didon came up with a simple motto for the Olympic Games. In Latin, it was ‘ Citius, altius, fortius.’ It means ‘ Faster, Higher, Stronger.’

The Athlete’s Oath
At every opening ceremony a chosen athlete reads the oath on behalf of all other athletes. The oath was first used in 1920. A more modern version of the oath is used today.

The Medal Ceremony
Only first-place winners received an award at the Ancient Olympics. It was a wreath cut from the branch of a sacred olive tree and a container of olive oil! These days, medals are awarded to the top three placegetters: Gold for first place, Silver for second place and Bronze for third place.

Sacred Truce
At the Ancient Olympic Games, a truce was made that meant that, regardless of current wars, athletes, artists and their families, as well as ordinary people, could travel in safety to the Olympic Games and return home safely afterwards. The Olympic truce today promotes peace, friendship and understanding in the world around each Games.