



Canning House

Forgotten Histories

THE THIN RED LINE:

The British Community in Porfirian Pachuca and Real del Monte

Craig White, Secretary of the Mexico Cricket Association

“PACHUCA IS SITUATED in a narrow valley, enclosed by steep, rugged hills destitute of vegetation. Its present population, with surrounding hamlets, may safely be estimated at 25,000, and this number is daily increasing as mines are coming into “bonanza”, and additional labour is required”, described the British tourist Thomas Brocklehurst on his visit in July 1881. He continued: “From the muddy river, which runs through the town, the houses and mining works on each side rise terrace upon terrace. The church is shabby, the market-place a mound of dirt, the streets narrow and abominable; in a word, it is a mining town in which the high weekly wages of the workmen are gambled away or spent on drink on pay-day, and the women and children are left to struggle and starve through the following six-days as best they may”.¹

During his walk around Pachuca, which is the capital of the mountain state of Hidalgo in central Mexico, Brocklehurst bumped into “a good many Cornish miners” “these gentry being distinguishable from the natives by both appearance and language”. After chatting to them he found out that “they were overlookers, and well to do” although he was saddened “to hear of them complain of England, and the neglected and uncared for condition into which they were allowed to fall before they emigrated from Cornwall”.²

Later Brocklehurst inspected the nearby Santa Gertrudis, San Juan, and Rosario silver mines on invitation of the Real del Monte Company, which owned 77 of the 267 silver mines in the region with between 500 and 1000 men and children working in each. At Santa Gertrudis our hero put on flannel trousers and a jacket, and a heavy hat with a candle attached, and descended in a bucket to the bottom of the mine.³ There were red faces all round beforehand though when the Cornish engineer who lowered him down the shaft was the same man that he had an argument over a seat on the train up from Mexico City to Pachuca. Happily, he emerged unscathed from the mine.

The next port of call for Brocklehurst was the other side of the mountain, that was “dotted over with little white-washed columns, indicating the extent and position of the mines below”⁴, to the village of Real del Monte, - “a very favourable contrast to Pachuca”⁵, he concluded.



Real del Monte was where the first miners from Falmouth in Cornwall had arrived in May 1826 to bring the local silver mine, amongst the richest in the world, that had been devastated in the Mexican war of independence against Spain back into operation and make it profitable once more. In the decades that followed more Cornish miners, attracted by the high wages being offered by the British Real del Monte Company and to escape poverty, came from Troon, Camborne, Redruth, Gwennap, St. Ives, Penzance, and Trelissick to settle in Real del Monte. There they created a miniature version of Britain by setting up churches, schools, shops, and sports clubs and by bringing their customs and food with them.⁶

The British tourist William Bullock was surprised by what he saw whilst visiting one Sunday in 1865. On entering Real del Monte he saw a “picturesque and airy cemetery – the sleeping-place of many Cornishmen”. When the Cornish died, they were not permitted to be interred alongside Catholics due to being Protestants, and so burial was a problem. Therefore, the Mexican government a decade or so earlier had ceded and guaranteed to United Kingdom 20 acres of land on the Hill of the Jew above the town where the Cornish deceased could be buried. Since it was the Lord’s day Bullock listened to a Church service being given to a congregation of “about sixty English men and women with clean bright shining faces”⁷. After the service he got lost whilst exploring Real del Monte, but soon got talking to a Cornish shopkeeper and learned that an Englishman named Chawner was doing time for murder in the town’s prison. Bullock visited the prisoner who told him that several years previously he had been travelling with his wife from Real del Monte to Mexico City when the diligence in which they were travelling was attacked by bandits, and his spouse

was shot dead. Chawner had returned fire and killed several of the bandits, for which he was arrested and incarcerated.⁸

Over time the Cornish established themselves in Pachuca and worked the silver mines there as well. Like in Real Monte, they left a mark on the town. A Methodist Church was constructed in 1901 so the Cornish had their own place of worship and in 1910 to commemorate the centenary of Mexican independence the Monumental Clock was inaugurated. The sound that the bell makes to mark the hours is a replica of Big Ben in London, serving as a reminder of the British presence in Pachuca.⁹

When Brocklehurst was in the region the British and Anglo-Mexican population was about 350, large enough to support three cricket teams, which were amongst the oldest sports clubs in Mexico.¹⁰ Cricket was the British national pastime, the most cherished institution, and the highest expression of United Kingdom's moral code and values. *The Mexican Herald* reporting in 1900 tells us that in Pachuca "the English national game has been played in and around this city for more than sixty years".¹¹ Pachuca Cricket Club was established first by at least 1864 and "the members of which appear to greatly enjoy the sport and play frequent matches" observed *The Two Republics* newspaper¹²; Real del Monte Cricket Club (nicknamed the "Mountain Boys") was founded in 1882; and the youngest was Velasco Cricket Club (or the "Cabbage Stump

Club” as they were known) in the village of Velasco. Real del Monte Cricket Club was able to field two elevens as shown on 29 June 1882 when the A side made 32 and the B side 20 in the first innings and then 48 and 49 apiece in the second innings.¹³

The Treasurer of the Pachuca Cricket Club was Frank Rule, the pillar of the British community in Hidalgo and a self-made man who rose to the top of local society. He arrived in Real del Monte in 1852 from Camborne aged 17 without a penny to his name, to work in the mine. Soon after Rule was appointed foreman (gaining the life-long name the “Captain” from the English-speaking population in Mexico as a result) and became the last Cornish administrator of the Real del Monte Company that had transferred to Mexican ownership in 1849. During his spare time, he prospected for mines in the state. Following decades of exploring the Hidalgo mountains, Rule discovered the Santa Gertrudis and Santa Ana silver veins in 1875 and formed his own companies to manage and exploit them. A year later he added to his portfolio by purchasing the properties of La Blanca and Anexas that contained three silver mines. Rule led a host of other mining ventures in Hidalgo, like the Maravillas Anexas Mining Company that extracted gold, lead, silver, and zinc. Under his skilled management, San Gertrudis was turning in profits of over \$1 million USD by 1898 and in 1910 he sold the mine to the British Camp Bird Company for \$9 million USD. Such was his knowledge, experience and talent for mining that Rule was called “The Silver King” and he was the authority for all things mining in Mexico and shares could rise and fall on his opinion.

Mining made Rule extremely wealthy and he owned eight haciendas in Hidalgo and the state of Queretaro, a house in Mexico

City, and a private railway coach to travel between Pachuca and the capital. He also used the money he accumulated for civic improvement in Pachuca and it was he who financed the construction of the Methodist Church and Monumental Clock, as well as a mansion in 1896 on Plaza General Pedro Maria Anaya where he lived with his family and entertained his friend the President Porfirio Diaz; a school, the Hotel de los Baños, the Hotel Grenfell, and his own bank. Rule loved Mexico but was “British to the backbone” as he proudly told a Cornish newspaper and when the authorities in Pachuca told him that he was not allowed to fly the British flag over his bank, in defiance he erected a six foot high stone parapet with the Union Jack carved into six panels. He died in 1920 after a long innings of 90 years.¹⁴

The first record in Pachuca of a little-known sport called football is at Rule’s De Campo hacienda near the town when the local Benevolent Club held its annual picnic on the property on 2 November 1892. *The Two Republics* picks up the thread:

The first part of the programme was a football practice which was indulged in by the young athletes of the British Colony. Sides being chosen, the game commenced and after having displayed their process and tactics for 15 minutes, the players enjoyed a well-earned rest at the call of half time. After a short clapse [sic] the game recommenced with renewed vigor and lasted another fifteen minutes.¹⁵

Messrs. Rule (not Frank), Abraham, Ludlow, Rabling and Rogers, all prominent cricketers, were commended for their football skills.

While the practice was going on the ladies from Pachuca's Improvement Society were serving cups of tea and getting the tables ready for a barbacoa lunch at 12pm.

The cricket teams played on weekends and rivalries existed between them. Ever present in the ranks were Cornish and other British surnames: Rule (no relation to Frank), Rabling, Pengelley, Hocking, Skewes, Smith, Blamey, Bawden, Retallac, Grenfell, Rosevar, Richards, Vial, Wilson, Chappel, Pascoe, Moyle, Arthur, Ferril, Dunstan, Goldsworthy, Hoskins, Harris, Williams, Gidley, Ludlow, Smith, Abraham, Rogers, Morshead. Pachuca and Velasco held their games at Cuesco farm "a ground probably unrivalled in the world; whether for extent or picturesque surroundings" raved *The Two Republics*, "certainly, the historic "Lord's", so dear to Eton and Harrow boys so expensive to Oxford and Cambridge men, cannot compare with it".¹⁶

Pachuca and Real del Monte welcomed in 1886 with a bracing game on New Year's Day where the former won by 51 runs.¹⁷ The Real del Monte team disappeared during the latter part of the decade because we hear nothing more of the club after this match. Pachuca and Velasco played on 29 June 1891 in a game contentious among some for its scoring. Pachuca wielded the willow first and made 71 and Velasco responded with 90. In the second innings Pachuca put on 128 and had reduced Velasco to 79-5 when the darkness set in meaning the match could not be completed. Velasco won by 19 runs on their first innings score.¹⁸ The *Daily Anglo-American* newspaper published the scorecard and apparently it had made a mistake in the result, prompting "Fidelity" from Real del Monte to write to the Editor:

Allow me to correct a mistake which appeared in your issue of the 1st respecting the Cricket Match which was played at Pachuca on the 29th ultimo. The Velasco C.C. failed to win the second innings by 27 runs (and with five wickets to go down) instead of 30 as reported in your paper, the Velasco C.C. not being credited with 3 more runs more, which they actually made.

This provoked a snide response from the Editor below the line: “A mistake was made by either the printers or inability to correctly make out the hieroglyphics commonly called a cricket score”. A game on 8 September went off without incident, again Velasco emerged victorious, by 69 runs.²⁰

Towards the end of the 1880s and into the mid-1890s Pachuca and Velasco came down from the mountains to test their strength against the teams that had recently appeared in Mexico City and in the surrounding states of Mexico and Puebla, established as a result of the increasing British investment into Mexico facilitated by the political and economic stability created by the President Porfirio Diaz. There were also sides in the far-flung corners of the country at this time, but these were too far away for the Hidalgo teams to travel: in the north in the desert of Coahuila there was the Santa

Rosa Athletic Club in Santa Rosa and a railway workers' team in Porfirio Diaz City; and in the jungles of the Yucatan peninsula in the southeast a happy few had set up the Champion Club in Merida.

"It is some 25 years since these two clubs tried conclusions" remembered *The Two Republics* wistfully on 22 October 1889 a week before Pachuca and a Mexico City eleven met in the capital.²¹ The game took place on Saturday 3 November and tents were put up and unlimited refreshments were provided for the large crowd that attended. Mexico City assembled a team of the great and the good from its own British community including, the Reverend Sherlock of the Anglican Church and the peers of the Realm the Honorable Claude Stanhope and the Honorable Chandos Stanhope, siblings involved in railway affairs in Porfirian Mexico and brothers of United Kingdom Secretary of State for War, Edward Stanhope. Pachuca went to the crease first and scored 77 before Mexico City battered its attack for 155 runs in two hours. Lunch was called at 1.30pm and during the interval a photo of the sides was taken to remember the historic encounter, but that has now been lost to history. Pachuca went out to bat for the second innings and put on 105, leaving Mexico City needing only 27 to win which they knocked off in under an hour for the loss of 2 wickets.²² In the evening Mexico City held a banquet for Pachuca "as a proper tribute of hospitality to their friends from the great mining town" stated *The Two Republics*.²³

There was a return fixture in Pachuca on Monday 5 May 1890 under the "burden and the heat" of the Hidalgo sun. Once more Mexico City had the Honorable Claude Stanhope and the Honorable Chandos Stanhope in the side, whilst the Reverend

Sherlock was on umpiring duties for the day. The players took precautions and kept well hydrated and fueled throughout the match by drinking Cornish beer and tucking into Cornish pasties. In the first innings Mexico City made 124 and Pachuca made 100. After lunch, it was the second innings and Mexico City powered to 187, leaving Pachuca with 212 to chase down to win. They crumbled and were bundled out for 44, to be crushed by 167 runs. Pachuca got their excuses into *The Two Republics* to explain away the defeat by complaining “they had for adversaries not only Mexico City but the whole of the Republic of Mexico as well”. The players headed back into town for a dinner organised by Frank Rule in the residence of the Governor of Hidalgo. The Silver King was the master of the ceremonies for the evening and gave the toast to the British Queen Victoria, to which he received rapturous applause. “Suffice is it to say”, concluded *The Two Republics*, “there is an immense amount of the Rule Britannia spirit in the air of Pachuca and that Captain Rule is responsible for it, and wields the scepter exceedingly well”.²⁴

Velasco seem to have been the strongest club in this small cricket world of the early Porfiriato as a letter from “An Admirer of Cricket” to *The Two Republics* on 19 September 1891 suggests:

Velasco Cricket Club claim to be the champions of Mexico; they have now played 9 games and have not been defeated: 2 games with Puebla Cricket Club; 2 games with San Cristobal C.C and 5 with Pachuca C.C. and one forfeit game from Read, Campbell & Co C.C.²⁵

They made it 10 when they beat a visiting Puebla Cricket Club by 5 wickets two days later.²⁶ The one team conspicuously absent from

the list of the vanquished was Mexico City, but Velasco looked to put this right by issuing a challenge to this effect the same month. However, one wonders what the exact content and wording was, because it drew a belligerent response in *The Two Republics* from an anonymous Mexico City reader on 23rd:

There is another set of boys at Pachuca who are very lively and very combative – I mean the Velasco cricketing boys. They have, to all intents and purposes, challenged the English cricketers of this city. Mark the Velasco boys' very words: "If any of those good players residing in and around the City of Mexico are desirous of meeting any Cricket Club, the Velasco Cricket Club would be only too glad to meet them, and would be glad to hear from any Cricket Club in the Republic of Mexico". This indicates business. Who's afraid? Not the boys of this city, for I understand that they intend calling the Pachucaites to account. Stretchers and medical attendance will be provided.

One person was desperate for this match to take place. "Ambidexter" in Pachuca implored Mexico City to thrash Velasco in a letter to the *Daily Anglo-American* on 10 October. There are suspicions that "Ambidexter" was a Pachuca Cricket Club player with a chip on his shoulder as he affirmed that Pachuca was in fact "the most skillful team of the two teams" in Hidalgo, although grudgingly conceded Velasco to be "invincible" and "having a reputation worthy of a superior club". He signed off with the uncharitable remark that a few of the Velasco members were

obese and had reached the veteran stage of their careers.²⁸ However, it is unclear whether a game between Velasco and Mexico City was held or not because there is no mention of an encounter in neither *The Two Republics* nor the *Daily Anglo-American*, the two English language newspapers in print at the time. Assuming the fixture didn't happen, the next assignment for Velasco was their Boxing Day 1891 trip to San Cristobal in Mexico state to play San Cristobal Cricket Club, where they won by 24 runs to make it 11 unbeaten.²⁹

Pachuca went down to Mexico City on Independence Day 1895 to take on The Reforma Athletic Club that had been founded in March the year before as "a Private Club for Lawn Tennis, Cricket, and Other Amusements".³⁰ In the crowd watching were the capital's British bigwigs, including the Ambassador Sir Henry Dering, the Vice-Counsel Colonel Crewe Read, and a blast from the past in the Honorable Chandos Stanhope, who was a patron of The Reforma Athletic Club. Pachuca lost by 3 runs.³¹



Perhaps inspired by the day out at The Reforma Athletic Club, one of the many athletic clubs that were popping up in the middle of the decade to accommodate under one roof the growing number of sports appearing in Mexico, or maybe seeing strength in numbers and by pooling resources, a meeting was held in early October 1895 at La Luz hacienda in the Pachuca suburb of Xochiuacan to merge Pachuca Cricket Club, Velasco Cricket Club, and Pachuca Football Club into a single sports organisation “where cricket, football, tennis, and other athletic exercise can be indulged in”, reported *The Mexican Herald*, another English language newspaper that had recently started circulation. Elections for this brave new Pachuca Athletic Club were held and none other than our old friend Frank Rule was appointed both President and Treasurer. The other positions were: Vice-Presidents: William Rule, J. Bennets, and J. Jury; Secretary: Godfrey Vivian; Managing Committee: J. Harris, John Rule, R. Rabling, R. Morshead, C. Rabling, and Edgar Rabling. The directors of La Luz generously allowed Pachuca Athletic Club to use the hacienda for free but there was to be no sport on Sunday. 50 members quickly joined and paid their subscriptions, ready to accept cricket, football, and tennis challenges from all-comers (within a reasonable distance of Pachuca).³²

Cricket matches in Hidalgo were great social occasions for the British community in Mexico, such as at the clash between Pachuca Athletic Club and Mexico Cricket Club (founded 1896) from Mexico City on 14 June 1900. On the day the British turned up in their hundreds with picnics to watch the game. The majority were from Pachuca, Real del Monte, Velasco, and El Chico, but some came up on the train from the capital and as far afield as the states of Puebla and Veracruz. Tents were set up around the field at La Luz

hacienda, Union Jacks flying above in the wind, to accommodate the players, women and children, local top brass and private parties, and to house the refreshments. The Pachuca brass band was in attendance, showing its support for the beleaguered British forces fighting the Boers in South Africa, by playing a patriotic music programme that “indicated the nationality of the players” noted *The Mexican Herald*; songs included “Brave England”, “The Fall of Pretoria”, “Relief of Ladysmith”, “General Bailer’s March”, “Lord Robert’s Waltz”, “White’s Polka”, “Baden Powell’s Quadrille”, “God Bless the Prince of Wales”, “God Save the Queen”, and “See the Conquering Hero Comes”. Gambling went on in the crowd and the spectators were in fine voice, cheering every 4 and 6. Pachuca won by 10 runs.³³

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