

Cricketers and Footballers and the M.C.C.C., 1970

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My father Alan was an accredited cricket umpire. When our family lived in Mexico, this was probably a unique qualification. Redundant? Not at all. Dad became official umpire for the M.C.C.C.; that is, the Mexico City Cricket Club, comprised mostly of expat Brits. The M.C.C.C. had a ground with a turf wicket at a fancy sporting club called the Reforma Club. A photo from 1969 of the scene during a match, from Dad's collection, looks rather idyllic. Cricket as it is meant to be, I would say.

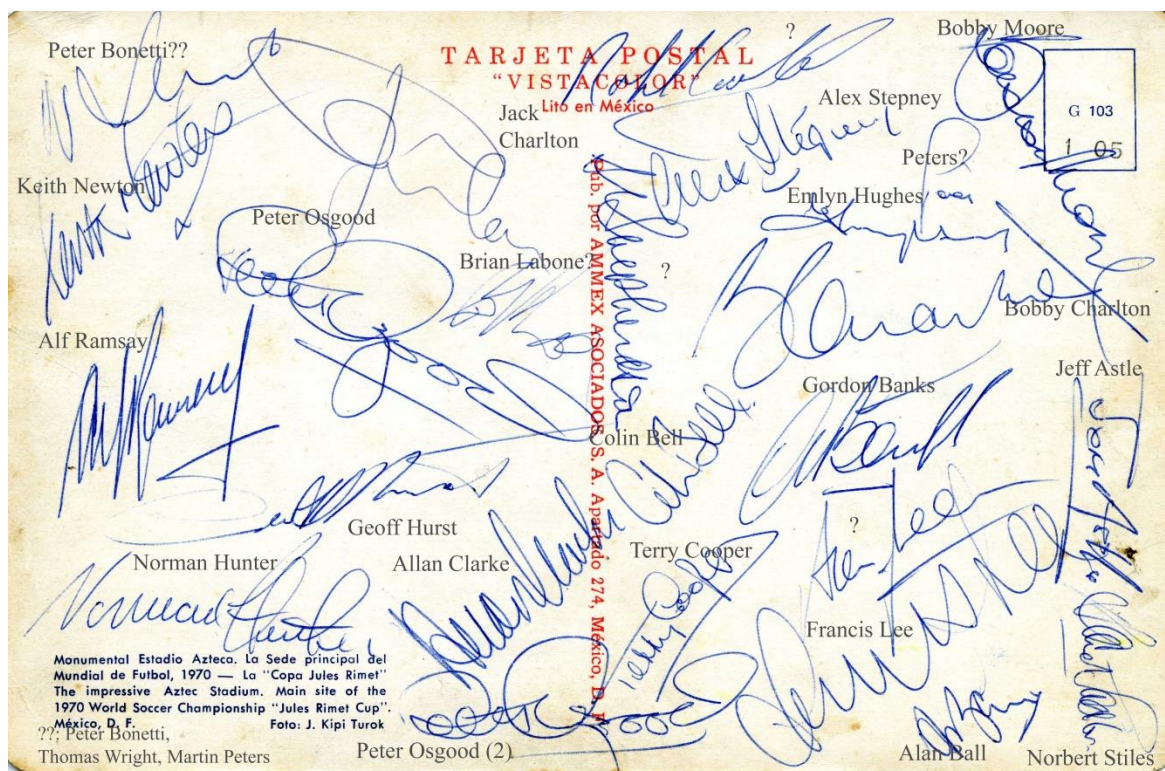


My mother and younger sister are in the photo, showing their customary level of interest in the game. The location would be rather hard to guess. Those are Australian gum trees in the background, which happen to be common in that part of Mexico.

A highlight of that time, for me, was the visit of the 1970 England World Cup football team, the defending champions. While preparing for the tournament, which included acclimatising to Mexico City's high altitude, they took a day off and spent it at the cricket club. They played a picnic match against the M.C.C.C., and as you might expect from a group of exceptional athletes, absolutely thrashed the 'locals'. During the day, I managed to procure the autographs of most of them on a postcard, which I now have framed (famous names: the Charlton brothers, Bobby Moore, Gordon Banks, etc., even Alf Ramsay. Somehow I managed to get Peter Osgood twice.)



An autograph from Bobby Charlton



The autographed postcard



One of Dad's friends, Mr Claverly, had managed – I don't know how – to get a few tickets to the opening game of the tournament, between Mexico and the USSR. Dad did not go, but my brother and I were taken along. We allowed masses of time but still nearly missed the game. It was typical Mexican mayhem in the parking area and outside the Aztec Stadium, a crushing chaos, a world away from the M.C.C.C. We missed the opening ceremony, and had almost given up hope of getting in when Mr Claverly saw an opportunity. A marching band, under police escort, was being ushered into the stadium. We quietly fell in among them, and when we got through the gate, made a break for the stands. Every seat was already filled including ours, but we found space sitting on the steps. No one checked our tickets at any stage.

The atmosphere inside the stadium was electric, a Latin American football frenzy. The capacity of 110,000 people must have been well exceeded. The crowd was desperate for a Mexico win, but the players seemed desperate not to lose, and the game itself was a rather dull goalless draw. It didn't matter too much; altogether, an unforgettable day out.

Post Script: I lost track of the postcard almost immediately afterwards. However, my sister Pamela kept it safe, and presented it to me on my birthday many years later.

The Cricket Club still exists, and even has a small pavilion now. They have a bit of a league going, thanks partly to keen expat Indians and Pakistanis.