



The Larios Family - Master of the Hunt

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Pablo Larios and his Calpe hounds depicted by Lionel Edwards in 1929

Whenever the name of the Larios family crops up in any history of Gibraltar it invariably does so because of their two main claims to Gibraltarian fame - one member of the family purchased Gibraltar's best known residential property in Commercial Square and the other was Master of the Royal Calpe Hunt.

The first claim is attributed to the fact that the Larios were a very wealthy family, as is the second but usually accompanied by a certain air of wonderment - it was hard to imagine why a 'Spaniard', however rich, was put in charge for nearly half a century - a first stint from 1891 to 1932 and then again from 1934 to 1938 - of such a thoroughly British institution controlled and managed in all other respects by British Army officers. That the Larios were civilians of Spanish origin - and a very small number of civilian non-British born residents of the Rock ever made it as members - made it doubly unusual.

The origins of the Larios family, its involvement in the industrial beginnings of the province of Malaga and the Campo de Gibraltar and its connections with other Spanish families such as the Herredias are far too complex to enter into here. Suffice to start with the first Larios with Gibraltar connections.

Pablo Larios de las Heras was born in the Rioja in 1755. His first wife Ana Llera, died young and he settled for a while in Malaga with his son Manuel Domingo. He soon remarried and his new wife Gregoria Herreros gave him another three sons, Pablo Eustaquio, Martin and Juan.

In 1809, aged 54, he settled in Gibraltar with his family. He was not the only Spanish merchant to do so. The Peninsular War had converted Gibraltar into a gold mine. Indeed there were so many of them on the Rock at the time that in 1812 and 1813 the Gibraltar Chronicle brought out Spanish editions.

When Larios de la Herras died his son Pablo Eustaquio took over the family business. His decision to stay put in Gibraltar rather than return to his native Spain was an easy one. Spain's South American colonies were in revolt and refusing to trade with their old mother country and business on the Rock boomed as they had no objections whatsoever in trading with Gibraltar.

It was during these bonanza days that Pablo Eustaquio married a local girl with a wonderful name - Geronima Tashara Celli. She gave him four sons - Pablo Antonio (1819-1879), Ricardo (1820-1892) and Arthur (1842-1912) - the later reportedly insane for many years. Of his three daughters, Carolina married a certain Fernando Schott who was the Prussian consul on the Rock. The other two married British officers. All were born in Gibraltar.

Pablo Eustaquio and his sons continued expanding their family business despite the fact that by the middle of the 19th century the economy of the Rock had now become rather sluggish. In an article in the Gibraltar Heritage Journal Tito Benady makes a tongue-in-cheek suggestion as to how the family managed to survive the depression without any great loss of income - and why it was that they decided to stay on in Gibraltar.

Apparently Friedrich Engels in 1885, wrote a letter to Pablo Iglesias - the Spanish founder member of the PSOE - about an incident that had occurred in Gibraltar. It seems that an English merchant was in the habit of sending the Larios goods on consignment so that they would move them on to be sold as contraband by other merchants in Spain.

Unfortunately the merchandise was invariably seized by the Spanish customs and Larios was forced to reimburse the English merchant the amount for which the goods were insured. This happened so often that the merchant simply gave up trading in the Spanish market. He was nevertheless curious to find out why his goods never seemed to be able to make it through customs and returned to Gibraltar to see if he could find out. He did.

One evening, strolling casually through town, a cart carrying wooden cases broke down and spilt its cargo on to road. To his surprise the cases were precisely those that he himself had once used to pack his merchandise. Perhaps even more surprisingly was the fact that they contained no saleable goods but were instead filled with sand.

It suddenly dawned on the merchant just how the Larios had manipulated events to their own advantage. They had emptied the boxes of their original stock, filled them with sand and then informed the Spanish customs. The boxes were immediately confiscated. The Larios then paid the Englishman his insurance, forwarded the real goods to their own intermediaries in Spain and pocketed the profit.

When the furious merchant confronted them the Larios in true Mafioso mode simply kept their calm and told the Englishman to keep his . Why was he getting so upset? they asked. They would pay him for his trouble - no problem. As Tito Benady tells us in an article in the Gibraltar Heritage Magazine, Engels may have heard this story from the horse's mouth as he had once worked in Manchester for quite a while. It was a city where one could find quite a few British merchants trading with Gibraltar.

When Pablo Eustaquio died in 1869 his eldest son Pablo Antonio inherited most of his fortune and soon began the enjoyable activity of spending it. In 1874 he donated a new clock for the tower of the local Catholic Church of St. Mary the Crowned and then completed his well-known purchase of Aaron Cardozo's house in Commercial Square - of which the cost of refurbishing alone would have been enough to bankrupt most other wealthy merchants in Gibraltar.

In partnership with the Malaqueño branch of the Larios family , Pablo Antonio also bought up large chunks of property in the surrounding *Campo de Gibraltar*, including most of the *Almoraima* corkwoods near *San Roque* , something that will have done the family cork business and its *La Línea* factory no harm at all.

Generously - and perhaps with one eye on future political gain - he immediately placed the house at the disposal of the Duke of Connaught, the son of Queen Victoria, who happened to be doing a tour of duty in Gibraltar at the time.



The Duke of Connaught

In 1861 Pablo Antonio then married a local girl called Leocadia Sanchez Piña. He was forty two years old while his bride was thirty. When the Duke moved out Larios moved in. Aaron Cardozo's old mansion was now known as Connaught house. It was the name by which it would continue to be known as right up to the 1920s.

When the Duke left - he was only there for a few months - Pablo Antonio moved in with his family. The 1878 census shows a Paul Larios, his wife Locadia and his son Chas all living in No. 6 Commercial Square. The residents of next door No 5 were Pablo's mother Geronima and her mentally handicapped son Arthur.

Unfortunately Pablo Antonio had little time left to enjoy his move. He died under tragic circumstances in 1879 when he was struck by a horse which was being exercised by a Sergeant Howell of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The sergeant was exonerated on the grounds that that the horse had bolted and that there was little he could have done to avoid it - but Pablo Antonio died two days later.

Ironically, the Duke of Connaught was just about to revisit Gibraltar a few day before the accident. When he arrived he is reputed to have said that Larios had been a dear friend and that he had always considered him to be a representative of the inhabitants of Gibraltar. Whether the first comment was true or not cannot be verified but the second is influenced by the colonial attitudes of the day. Pablo Antonio was the appointed chairman of the Sanitary Commission - a poor imitation of what elsewhere might have been called a city council. Larios however, represented nobody but himself and was appointed not by the people of the Rock but by its Governor.

The tradition of having the annual *Corpus Christi* procession make a prolonged stop in front of Connaught House had more to do with the obsequiousness of the Catholic Church toward people of great wealth and power than to any great love shown towards the family by the ordinary residents. Nevertheless, and as was usual in those days, it is probable that his philanthropic work coloured their perception of both him and his family.

Pablo Antonio left five sons - **Pablo, Ernest, Leopold, Augustus and Carlos**, their initials forming the word 'Calpe'. None of these, other than Carlos appear on the census because they were all in England studying at **Beaumont College**. Pablo went on the study chemistry at Owen College in Manchester and at Brunswick Politechnique School in Germany. Apart from his appearance on the census, there is no further record of Arturo.



1909 - The Larios brothers at a hunt in San Martin de Tesorillo a small town north of the Guadiaro River. From left to right, Carlos, Augusto, Leopoldo, Ernesto y Pablo - If Ernesto had moved over to the right it would have been CALPE.

Finishing their studies the Larios sons returned to Gibraltar and threw themselves into some serious work - hunting, fishing, shooting, cricket, rowing, horse racing and polo were the order of the day - day in, day out. Horses were Pablo's passion - at the age of eleven he had ridden his first race at the North Front Racecourse. Later he won the Calpe Hunt Cup on his horse 'Macaroni'.



The Point to Point

When polo was introduced to the Gibraltar by the Rifle Brigade in 1885, Pablo and his brothers discovered that they were particularly adept at the game.

In July 1897, the first international match took place in the *Aramilla* grounds in Granada. The newly formed Gibraltar Garrison Polo Club team took on a Spanish team was captained by Pablo Marquis de Larios with his brothers Ernesto and Leopoldo and the Duque of Arión

The **Duke of Alba** made a bet that they would be able to beat the French international team. They proved him right in Paris, went on to beat a good American team and were then finally defeated by an English team at Hurlingham - the club which eventually became the headquarters of the game and drew up its first rules. (Alba was also an expert fly-fisherman and not only published *Rios Salmoneros de Asturias*, but also responsible for drafting Spain's laws on fresh-water fishing.)

In 1891 Pablo was elected Master of the Hounds of the Calpe Hunt. He was twenty six years old. Although a matter of supreme indifference to the world at large it was - from a Gibraltarian point of view - a unique event. The anecdotal evidence as to why a group of notoriously narrow-minded and generally chauvinistic officers decided to make a relative outsider the Master of one of their most prized institutions - and not just in Gibraltar - is considerable and is outlined elsewhere in the chapter on the Calpe Hunt, but perhaps there are certain aspects that are worth noting here.

For a start the sometimes daily movement of the Hunt across the frontier and over Spanish territory in the Campo de Gibraltar was not exactly something that would occur unnoticed by the Spanish authorities or the local population. The Hunt was often made up of more than a hundred horsemen, many of them well armed, most of

them uniformed military men and the whole lot accompanied by close to a hundred baying , and more or less out of control hounds. To the uninitiated, the overall impression was that of miniature invading army.



Pablo Larios, Master of the Hounds of the Calpe Hunt in 1891

Long before Pablo was elected we have evidence of the kind of difficulties which the hunt were experiencing. In 1847 during a speech acknowledging the work done by a retiring Master of the Hounds - a Lieutenant Colonel the Honourable L. Maule - the speaker thanked him 'for his urbanity and kindness' as well as 'his unremitting exertions at a time when the very existence of the Calpe Hunt was threatened' mostly because of the serious objections made on the part of the Spanish laird owners' who understandably did not take kindly to a large posse of horses trampling all over their properties.

In 1863 Colonel Somerset who was Master at the time, showed his exasperation in his reply to a toast at a farewell dinner by lambasting 'the ignorance and obstinate prejudices' of the Spaniards. They simply could not grasp that it was to their advantage to allow them to hunt their lands.

Six years later it was more of the same; Major George Peabody Scholfield in his *Ups and Downs of the Royal Calpe Hunt*, commented that before the commencement of the 1869-70, season 'the Hunt had an establishment of pack of hounds which any Master might be proud of' but that 'the present anticipation of sport certainly looked gloomy'.

The reason given by the Master at the time was that many of the best coverts had been burned, there was an increasing number of enclosures where hunting was unable to take place and that it was difficult to make the Spanish understand that they wanted to hunt the fox, and not simply destroy it.

On another occasion ' there was a shindy through a Spaniard grabbing a horse's reins. The huntsman then took it upon himself to use his whip on the local who responded by taking out his knife. A crowd of locals then pelted the rest of the Hunt

as they hastened away back home. In 1870 it was the Spanish police who intervened in another shindig and refused to allow the hunt to continue.

The problems refused to go away despite the fact that attempts were made to compensate the locals for any damages caused by the activities of the Hunt. In 1874 an irate huntsman writing in the Gibraltar Chronicle, tried to turn the tables on the Spaniards by accusing them of overcharging for damages and of killing the foxes on their land to spite the Hunt.

A week later the chronicle received a reply from somebody signing himself as 'a farmer'. It was, he wrote, bad enough that Spaniards 'should be 'larded over' and treated in such a 'high-handed fashion' when they were inside Gibraltar but it was worse when they were treated the same in their own country. It did not 'encourage the friendly feelings' that were necessary for the continuance of foxhunting in the neighbourhood.

It was a shot across the bows which carried both political and social implications - as Jennifer Ballantine mentions in her article in *Historia Contemporánea - Pablo Larios y el Calpe Hunt*. In 1886 the problem would simply not go away. When the crops of several 'fincas' in the San Roque area were almost entirely destroyed by the Hunt the owners did not just complain to the mayor of the town but made a concerted effort to kill as many foxes as possible in the surrounding area.

The response by the Spanish authorities was to protect the interests of the Hunt. As Ferguessen notes 'strange as it may seem, they had strict instructions to prevent the local people' from annoying them.

in 1883 and 1884 respectively, Carlos and Pablo Larios were elected members of the Hunt. It was a marriage of enormous convenience. The Larios may have been British but culturally they were as Spanish as the 'campesinos' on the other side of the border. Slowly but surely they ingratiated themselves with the disgruntled farmers - a meal here, an invitation there, an appropriate compensation elsewhere, - the Larios spoke the language and made sure the other side knew that they at least understood the problem. There was now no need to employ interpreters as had previously been required in dealings with the Spaniards.



1920s photograph of the Hunt probably on its way to the *Almoraima*. The gentleman in the middle is the Governor of Gibraltar, General Sir Alexander John Godley with one of the Larios daughters on his left. The rest reads like a page out of Debrett's. It includes people like the Duchess of Westminster and her daughter Lady Ursula Mary Olivia Grosvenor as well as Lady Mary Crichton-Stuart, daughter of the Marquess of Bute. At the time, the Governor Sir Alexander Godoy was trying hard to get rid of Larios and have himself appointed as Master. Miss Larios is mentioned but not her father - nor the fact that the various aristocratic people taking part were all good friends of Pablo Larios and were probably there as his guests rather than the Governors.

In 1889 in another unprecedented move, Doctor J. A. Patrón - a well-known non-British Gibraltar of considerable wealth was invited to become an honorary member of the Hunt. The motives were ulterior. Patrón was the owner of large tracts of land in the San Roque area. They wanted him to 'convince' his farmers to stop their systematic slaughter of foxes. Apropos Patrón was the doctor who was asked to prepare the analysis of supposed blood stains in the famous case of the ship the *Mary Celeste*

But this was mere detail. The membership of the Larios was really all that was required. They and other Spanish members of the family owned just about the entire area over which the Hunt carried out its business - including the whole of the corkwoods or Almoraima and vast areas on either sides of the Guadiaro river. It was not at all surprising that Pablo was elected Master of the Hounds in 1891 - and that he continued to be elected as such for the next forty odd years.

Larios is reputed to have soon put paid to any suggestion of his removal and the return of a military man as Master by reputedly spreading a rumour that he would

consider creating his own personal pack, something that would have proved the death knell of the Calpe Hunt. The uncomfortable fact that the military establishment had to face was that without Larios the Hunt was doomed.

Indeed when Larios threatened to resign because the Hunt's committee members voted against giving him extra funds for his expenses in looking after the pack, the Governor of Gibraltar, Sir Frederick Forrestier-Walker intervened and the increase in expenses were approved.



Sir Frederick Forrestier-Walker (1902 - Vanity Fair)

In 1906 the Governor announced that the name of the Calpe Hunt would be changed to the Royal Calpe Hunt. Larios, running roughshod over the strict protocol of the day had managed to persuade both Edward VII and Alfonso XIII to become patrons. A lot of people in Gibraltar were less than amused but this event highlights the power of Pablo's network of connections both in England and in Spain - not to mention Gibraltar.



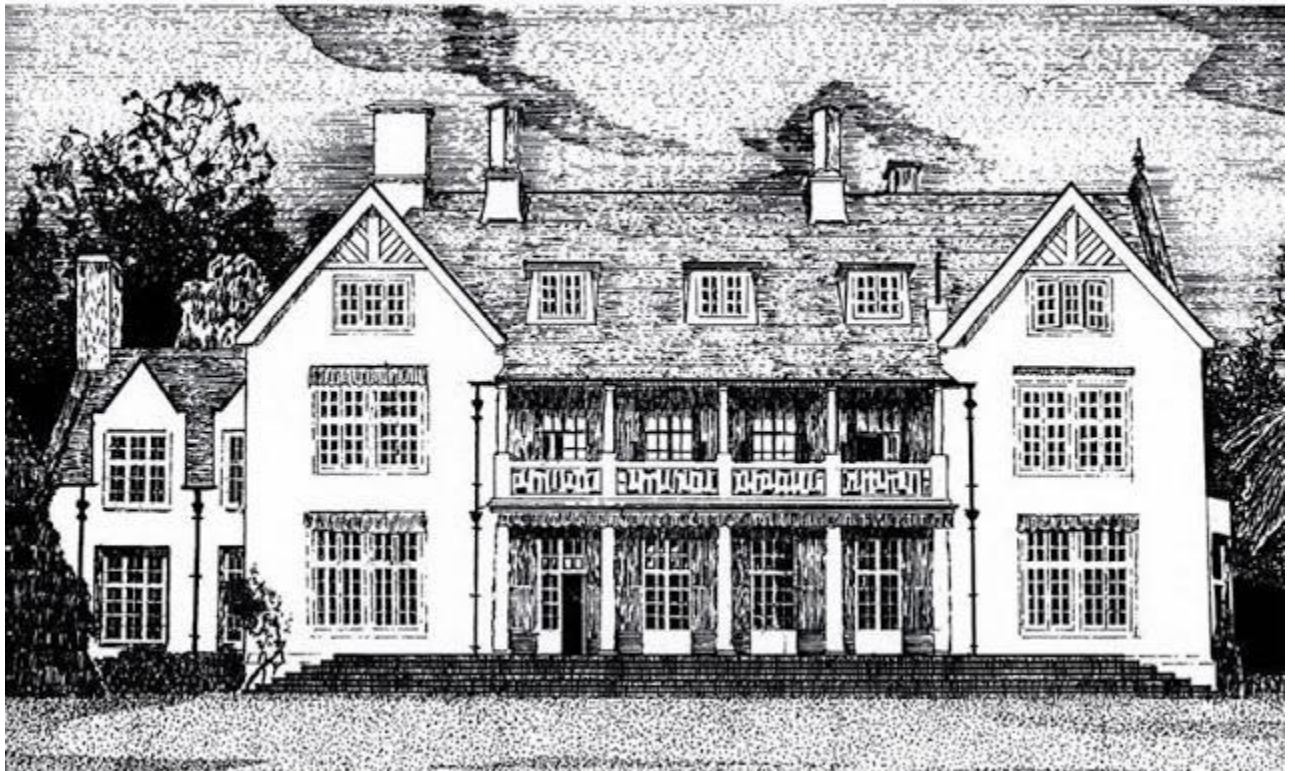
Another photograph of the Hunt. The fellow on the left is General S.E.B. Seely , the first Baron Mottistone. He had only recently resigned from his post as Secretary of State for War no less.

Pablo's more or less playboy style of living had to be paid for, of course, and most of the funds came from the families cork and sugar manufacturing businesses in La Linea - his large estates in the Campo area were probably run at a loss. Unfortunately in 1889 a tremendous fire destroyed most of the cork factory and most of its stock - despite help from fire engines from Gibraltar. Another fire broke out five years later in which two people died and several badly injured. A third fire in 1900 required the help of the British army to put it out.



Pablo (centre) photo taken in 1928

A year later, in 1901, Pablo married Josefa Fernandez de Villavicencio in Biarritz. Despite the fact that the family was now obviously in financial difficulties, the wedding was a magnificent affair. Still well accustomed to the good life, the happy couple were soon involved in a social whirl of parties and engagements not just in Connaught House in Gibraltar but in a superb residential pile which he had very recently built for his new family on a plot of land in *Guadacorte*. Near the river *Guadarranque*, it offered magnificent views over the Bay of Gibraltar and the Rock itself. Owning the best house in Gibraltar was obviously not enough.



Pablo's Palace in Guadacorte , supposedly in Scottish baronial style and influenced no doubt by his good friend the Marquis of Bute.



La Marquesa de Marzales y sus hijos en el cortijo de Guadacorte.

Pablo's wife - la Marquesa de Marzales - is probably the rider in the middle of this rather blurred photograph.

By 1920 the financial problems came to a head and Pablo Larios sold Connaught House to the British Government.

Soon after General Sir Alexander Godley became Governor in 1928 he took exception to the fact that a civilian was Master of the Hunt. Over a short period of time he made life so difficult for Larios that he was forced to resign. Larios, however, was able to retaliate where it hurt. He owned half of the Campo of Gibraltar and was able to put most of the land over which the hunt took place completely out of bounds. In a blind fury, Godley immediately issued an order that no officer of his was to fraternize with any member of the Larios family.



General Sir Alexander Godley, Governor of Gibraltar

The clash eventually became so serious that it came to the ears of King George V who was joint patron of the Hunt at the time and he asked his private secretary to make a few discrete inquiries as to what on earth was going on in Gibraltar. When he reported back to the King his message was succinct:

We've got a problem. On the one hand we've got the Godleys, and, on the other hand we've got the Ungodley's!

The feud was eventually settled as Godley was replaced by the next Governor, Sir Charles Harrington, who took the Solomonic decision of appointing his wife, Lady Harrington and Pablo Larios as joint Masters of the Hunt.

In 1938 Pablo Larios died in his house in Algeciras. His wish had been to be buried in the family vault in the North Front Cemetery. His body was brought by launch to the jetty at the Western Beach and accompanied with all pomp and circumstance by a funeral cortege.

It was the end of the family's long and important connection with Gibraltar



The Catholic cemetery at North Front - The Larios vault is somewhere in there (1880s - George Washington Wilson & Co)

Pablo Larios - however many titles and honours he may have had in Spain - was as a non-British born Gibraltarian unique in the annals of the history of the Rock. He and his family were aristocrats of the worst sort. Paternalistic, overbearing, snobbish and reactionary as were the vast majority of the Spanish aristocracy at the time. Later when all connections with Gibraltar were severed, the family inevitably sided with the Franco regime - one of them even fought as a pilot during the Civil War.

But at a time when it was probably thought by most people to be impossible, he took on for nearly half a century that impenetrable bastion of privilege that was the British establishment in Gibraltar - and he won hands down. Other Gibraltarians have seemingly done the same - the recall of Governors such as Gardiner and Hunter come to mind. But these Gibraltarians would never have succeeded without the help of people back in England and in particular, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Larios did it on his own and without the help of anybody other than the wealth, influence and power of his own family. His was a first.

As such, and despite his right wing views, I think we should be proud to call him a
Gibraltarian. I know I am.



Forever England with The Rock in the background

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