

LEARIE AND EDWIN IN THE COLNE VALLEY

By Mark Edmonds

Edwin St. Hill is regarded as one of Slaithwaite's greatest players, setting many firsts including being the first black player to represent a side in the Huddersfield League. However, how did he find out about the club? How does a player come to Slaithwaite via Lancashire from the West Indies? The man behind this move wasn't St. Hill himself, but the great West Indian all-rounder Sir Learie Nicholas Constantine, known later on as Baron Constantine.

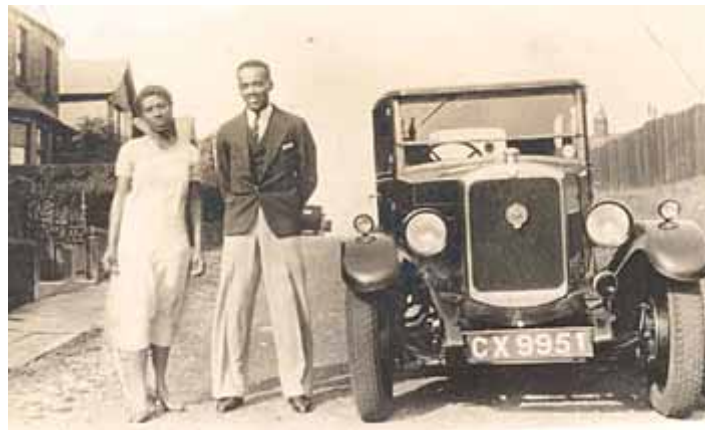


Constantine (above) was the main attraction at a friendly match between Slaithwaite and a team selected by then Paddock captain Herbert Robinson on 20 June 1933. The Robinson XI was made up of a selection of the best players from the Bradford League, while the Slaithwaite side could call upon the services of Constantine as well as players from Huddersfield and Thongsbridge. Before the game itself, Sir Learie was also given a tour of the ground and the village alongside Marjorie Knowles, Cotton Queen of Great Britain. With this in mind, just how good a cricketer was this man?

Baron Constantine was a right-hand batsman who could bowl at both medium and fast pace. He made 18 Test appearances for the Windies, finishing with an average of 19.24 with the bat while taking 58 wickets at an average of 30.10. He also made five first-class hundreds with career-best bowling figures of 8-38. Possibly his greatest cricketing achievement, however, was being named one of *Wisden's* five cricketers of the year in 1940. His cricketing exploits were rewarded in 1945 when he was awarded the MBE for services to the game before later being knighted in 1962.

As for St. Hill himself, he also represented the West Indies, albeit only in two Tests. He also played state cricket in both Australia and New Zealand before residing here in England during his peak years in his mid-to-late twenties. The West Indian was big news when he came to Slaithwaite, with a crowd of between 4,000 and 5,000 coming to the ground to see the all-rounder in action. All the attention that the travelling party received obviously had an effect on St. Hill, who promptly signed for the club later that season.

To put the signing of St. Hill into perspective and compared to today: the all-rounder was paid £240 for the season in addition to being granted a benefit match. Although this was a lot of money in the thirties, it seems almost paltry by today's standards where the same amount is less than the average weekly wage! The £240 was money well spent for the club, though, as in that season alone the club received over £500 in gate money, more than paying for both St. Hill's services and the everyday running of the club.



Mr and Mrs St. Hill in Slaithwaite

Nowadays there are black cricketers plying their trade throughout Kirklees and Calderdale, Zimbabwean Tinasha Panyangora at Barkisland last year being a recent example. However, Slaithwaite can proudly claim to be the first club in the area to sign a black player and, with it, have their own little piece of history.