

**AROUND  
THE  
WICKET**  
with historian  
**Peter Davies**

SLAITHWAITE CRICKET CLUB: the sixth in a fascinating series of club histories

# Scrapbooks record tales of innovation

**I**N 1925 James Gartside, President of Slaithwaite CC, voiced his concern that records of the club's past may be lost if action was not taken.

He wrote: 'The Slaithwaite Cricket Club has now been in existence for upwards of 50 years and I, and other persons connected with the club, have felt for some time that an attempt should be made to put on record the main events in the history of the club, for the benefit of both present and future generations, before all trace of its origin and happenings should be lost in the midst of time.'

Following this, a series of scrapbooks were begun, which provide a record of the club's fortunes through to the 1970s. The first of these books begins with an account of club's early history, which had been reproduced in a 1905 bazaar brochure.

**C**ricket was played in Slaithwaite before the present club was formed, in 1873. In the early 1870s the 'Old Slaithwaite Cricket Club died a natural death, principally owing to Lord Dartmouth wanting the ground for building purpose'.

The young men of Hill Top managed to beg or borrow the equipment from this original club and form Slaithwaite St. James CC. Although no mention is made of a link with St. James's, the local Anglican Church, the club's original name leaves little doubt that one existed. By 1877 this club was known by its current name, Slaithwaite Cricket Club.

The *Huddersfield Examiner* series *King Willows Haunts*, published in 1932, lists the leading players from this period, who were: Thomas and Lewis Bamforth, James Sykes, Wright Gledhill, John H Wood, John Hopkinson, J T Quarmby, J H Dransfield, Hiram Wood, Thomas Hirst and G Maxwell.

**I**n the early days, Slaithwaite often had to play 'fifteen to eighteen men... against the first elevens of other clubs'. This type of odds match was common for much of the nineteenth century.

Although league or cup competitions were not played until the 1880s, matches were still very competitive and often played for a stake. This was originally a sum of money, but by the 1870s teams commonly played for a matchball or an after-match dinner. So it was often agreed that weaker teams were allowed to field extra men to make the contest viable. The 1880s saw a rise in the club's fortunes which was sparked by two developments.

**F**irstly, the acquisition of a permanent home in 1881, after two venues had previously been used, meant that the playing area could be improved and finances raised through events like regular bazaars. Secondly, a professional was engaged, which helped improve the standard of the team.

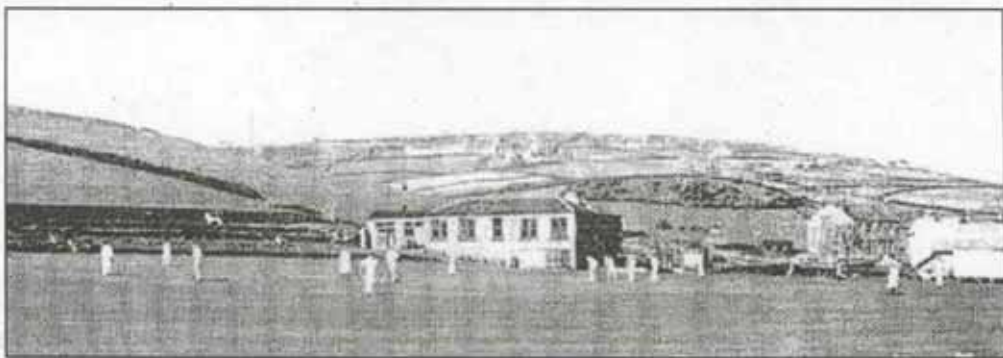
The *Huddersfield Examiner* explains how this led to an improvement in status and 'as time went on, better class clubs found their way into the Slaithwaite fixture list, and matches began to be played on equal terms.'

**D**uring the inter-war years Slaithwaite were one of the most successful clubs in the area. The 1st XI were Huddersfield League champions in 1925, 1929, 1934 and 1938 - while the 2nd XI league title was bagged in 1919, 1929, 1930, 1933 and 1936.

In the knockout competitions 1924 was a breakthrough year, as both the Sykes Cup and the Paddock Shield were brought home to Hill Top for the first time.

Villagers went out onto the streets to celebrate. The local press reported: 'This year was the greatest of them all... As was pointed out by Mr. Denton at the presentation ceremony, one of the secrets of the club's success is that there is a real clubbable feeling amongst its members, that manifests itself in a willingness to share the work and shoulder some of the responsibility. While this spirit persists there is no anxiety about the future fortunes of the club.'

**A**s clubs like Slaithwaite became more successful, they became more ambitious. Instead of hiring a professional from Huddersfield or Bradford, why



**□ GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM:** Hill Top, Slaithwaite pictured in 1951. The club's present facilities were first established in the 1880s.



**□ BEHIND WICKET:** Star stumper George Dawson.

not go further afield?

Learie Constantine was a legendary West Indian cricketer. He had become a huge star in league cricket circles after signing for Nelson. He played an exhibition match at Slaithwaite in 1932.

Accompanying him was Edwin St Hill, a fellow Trinidadian who was professional at Lowerhouses. St Hill was professional at Slaithwaite in 1934 and 1945 - almost certainly the first black player to star in the Huddersfield League. He took 152 wickets for the club in total at an average of 10.52. In his first season the club tied with Golcar for the League Championship with St Hill scoring 408 runs at an average of 20.40 and taking 87 wickets at 12.91.

The Slaithwaite CC annual report concluded that 'the engagement of St Hill has been successful to a point, and we claim it has brought increased interest into the League.'

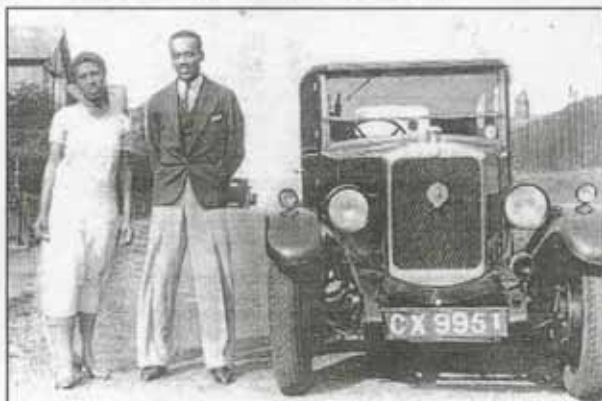
**I**n 1946 Jack Harbergham retired after playing for 16 years at Hill Top. He had taken 843 wickets for Slaithwaite at an average of 13.13. To mark his contribution to the club, a benefit was held via which £56 8s was raised by members.

Paying tribute to Harbergham, Mr Herbert Sykes said he had done a tremendous amount of 'donkey work' at Hill Top, mostly bowling uphill and against the wind!

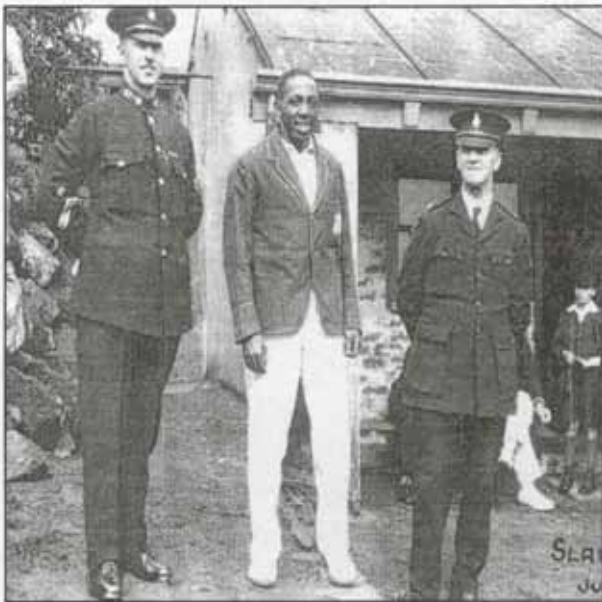
In 1972 J Walker (108) and J Chippendale (102 not out) shared a 200-plus stand for the first wicket. The year after, the club celebrated its Centenary, and produced a wonderful souvenir brochure to accompany the occasion.

Today Slaithwaite is a thriving local league club, with plenty of supportive local sponsors.

● Readers are asked to contact Peter Davies on 01484 472405 or via [p.j.davies@hud.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.davies@hud.ac.uk) if they have any more photos or information relating to local cricket history.



**□ BIG SIGNING:** Edwin St. Hill (pictured with his wife) signed for Slaithwaite for a fee of £240. The photo is taken from one of the legendary scrapbooks.



**□ STAR MAN:** In 1932 the great West Indian cricketer Learie Constantine visited Slaithwaite.