



## ROMANS



**1: First African Community**  
There were people born in Africa living in Northern England 2,000 years ago, when it was part of the Roman Empire. Evidence shows that the first African community was in Cumbria. Hadrian's Wall was protected by troops from across the Roman Empire. One unit from Mauretania (Tunisia/Libya/Algeria) in North West Africa lived at Aballava Roman Fort at Burgh by Sands in Cumbria in the third and fourth centuries AD.

soldiers would have had families living outside the fort and may have told their children songs and stories from Africa. This plaque placed outside St Michael's Church, Burgh by Sands in 2016, recognises this first African community.



**2: The African Emperor**  
Septimus Severus, the Emperor of Rome, AD 193-211, was born in Lepcis (Libya) and was of mixed African and Roman heritage. He came to Britain in the early third century AD and rebuilt much of Hadrian's Wall, including the fort at South Shields. He had problems with his two quarrelling sons and ill-health and died in York in 211AD. Coin with Septimus Severus, dated 201AD.



**3: Victor, the Freedman**  
Victor, a Moor from Mauretania in North West Africa, is remembered on this tombstone at Arbeia in South Shields. He was servant to a cavalryman, Numerianus, who was devoted to him and provided him with this beautiful tombstone, carved by a Syrian stonemason.

Map of Hadrian's Wall



## EARLY RESIDENTS



**4: William Fifefield**  
William Fifefield, from St Kitts, in the West Indies, settled in Newcastle in 1794. 'Well-known and respected', he worked as a ferryman on the Tyne river. He and his wife, Margaret Wintrup, lived near a building in Newcastle, called the Black Gate. He died in 1834. His son William Thomas had a hairdresser's shop on Groat Market, Newcastle. The Black Gate, Newcastle.

### 5: Mary Ann Macham

Mary Ann Macham (1802-1893) was sold at 12 years. She escaped enslavement in Virginia, North America and arrived in North Shields on Christmas Day in 1831. She was welcomed by the Miss Spences, a Quaker family. She worked in their household until her marriage to James Blyth, a local rope-maker. She lived in Nelson Street, North Shields and then in Benwell, Newcastle. She died, aged 91, and was buried in Tynemouth.



**6: Unknown young black servant**  
In this picture from the 1740s, artist William Bardwell has painted the rich Captain Robert Fenwick of Northumberland, with his wife and her sister at Norham Castle, Northumberland, one of their homes. Also, at the edge of the painting is an unknown young black servant.

## AFRICANS IN UNIFORM



**7: Jimmy Durham**  
In 1885, the Durham Light Infantry, having defeated a local army, found a baby in a boat on the Nile in the Sudan, Africa. The regiment adopted the baby and at the age of 14 he became the first African allowed to join the regular British army. He played the clarinet and violin in the army band. He lived in Darlington, Tyneside, and Bishop Auckland. He was a strong temperance supporter and died in Ireland aged 27 years, three weeks before his daughter was born.



**8: John Kent**  
John Kent (1805-1886) nicknamed 'Black Kent' is considered the first black police officer in Britain. He was a watchman and a parish constable in Maryport, near Carlisle and a constable in Carlisle, Cumbria. His duties included keeping

the peace and fighting fires. He also rescued a 17-year-old from drowning. He worked at Carlisle Citadel railway station as a railway policeman. He was described as 'a Carlisle notable' on his death.

## ENTERTAINERS



**19: Ira Aldridge**  
Ira Aldridge (1807-67), born in New York, North America, started acting at 14 years. Meeting racial discrimination, he moved to England, aged 17. He performed at Berwick, Alnwick and Newcastle between 1827 and 1857. A room at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle, was named after him. He was the first black Shakespearean actor, famous for his performance of Othello. He also played comedies joking on

stage about local people. Popular in Europe, he received awards from the rulers of Prussia (a German state), Russia and Bern, Switzerland. He died in 1867 in Poland, before his planned return performance in the USA.

### 20: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), with a father from Sierra Leone, proudly mixed African and classical music. He attended the Royal College of Music at age 15. His music was celebrated in Europe and the USA. He was received by the President of the USA in 1903, when most black people there were being treated very badly. He conducted Hiawatha's Wedding Feast, his most famous work, in Sunderland in November 1898.



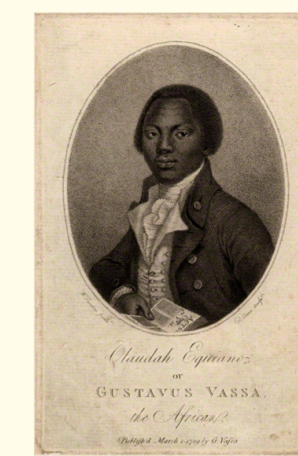
### 21: Paul Robeson

Paul Robeson (1898-1976), the son of an enslaved African American lived in England from 1923-39. His performances included the play Show Boat, the song, Old Man River, and the play Othello. Robeson regularly visited the North East in the 1940's and 1950's, singing to packed audiences in Newcastle City Hall and at free concerts in Gateshead. From 1933, he supported the rights of black people and workers everywhere, despite the

damage to his career.



## WRITERS



**9: Olaudah Equiano**  
Olaudah Equiano (1745-97) born in Nigeria, was kidnapped, and enslaved in the Caribbean and North America. He worked as a soldier, seaman, trader, and even an Arctic explorer. He bought his own freedom and lived permanently in England from 1777. He worked with lawyers to help people see that murdering enslaved Africans on the Zong ship was wrong. He told people how terrible enslavement was and wrote about this in his book, pictured below. He travelled to Newcastle, staying in Bigg Market, and to Durham and Stockton in 1792. In 1807 Britain officially stopped enslaving and shipping people from Africa.

### 10: Celestine Edwards

Samuel Celestine Edwards, (1857-94), one of ten children of previously enslaved parents, left Dominica, aged 12, to become a seaman. He lived in Sunderland in 1880-1882 working as a labourer and lecturer. His lectures at the Assembly Hall, Sunderland, emphasizing equality between African and white men met with great applause. He was a Christian preacher, a student doctor and an editor and writer. He used his journals and books to challenge racism in Britain and British violent rule in Uganda and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).



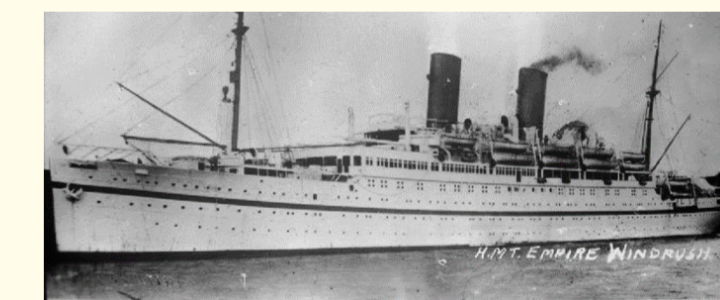
Assembly Hall, Sunderland, around 1900



## NATION BUILDERS



**22: Charles Duncan O'Neal**  
Charles Duncan O'Neal (1879-1936), from Barbados, studied at Edinburgh University. While a doctor in Newcastle and a councillor in the Sunderland area (1905-1910) he worked to help the poorer people. After spending 14 years in Trinidad and Dominica, he helped set up organisations in Barbados to work for better conditions for workers, for women and for compulsory free education for children. He became a Member of Parliament in Barbados and his picture is on the Barbados \$1 stamp and \$10 note.



### 23: Ivor Cummings

Ivor Cummings (1913-1992) was born in West Hartlepool. His father, from Sierra Leone, and his Yorkshire mother both worked at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle. Cummings supported the colonial hostels in Newcastle and North Shields and tried to make life in England better for students, residents and war volunteers from Africa and the Caribbean. In 1948 he met the Caribbean passengers who came on the Windrush Ship to build up Britain after the war.



**24: Archie Sibeko**  
Zola Ntambo, (1928–2018), born Archie Sibeko in South Africa, was a member of its African National Congress (ANC). Trained in guerrilla warfare in Russia, he led guerrilla camps in Tanzania and Zambia. During his exile (1963-90) he encouraged unions to support the South African unions and their struggle for freedom. He retired to Tynemouth in 2002, receiving an Honorary Doctorate from Newcastle University in 2017 for his contribution to overcoming racial discrimination.

## ORATORS



**11: Ellen Craft**  
Ellen (1826-91) and William Craft escaped from enslavement in North America, with Ellen dressed in men's clothes and William pretending to be her 'slave'. They fled to England in 1850 to avoid being recaptured. They wrote a book about their escape and they spoke against enslavement in Carlisle, Darlington, and Newcastle in 1851. Ellen later brought her newly freed mother to England. They returned to America with three of their five children after 19 years in England.

### 12: Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass, (1818-95) spoke against enslavement throughout Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, Carlisle and Darlington in 1846 and 1860. His lectures were so popular a special train was used so people from Sunderland, North and South Shields could attend his evening lecture in Gateshead. He often stayed with the Richardsons in Newcastle and Cullercoats and in 1847 they bought his freedom from enslavement. A plaque was erected to Frederick Douglass at their Newcastle home in 2018.



### 13: Martin Luther King Jnr.

Martin Luther King Junior, born 1929 in the USA, was a Christian minister, and a leader of the movement to give African people equal rights (civil rights movement). He led huge demonstrations for civil rights and supported non-violent action and the rights of workers and poor people. He was arrested 29 times and assassinated in 1968. His statue, pictured below, in Newcastle University's grounds commemorates his visit to Newcastle in 1967 to receive an honorary degree from Newcastle University.



## SPORTS PEOPLE



**14: Arthur Wharton**  
Arthur Wharton was born in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1865. He came to England to train as a Methodist minister but preferred cycling, cricket, running and football. Playing for Darlington Cricket Club, he recorded the first 10 second, 100-yard heat and final. He played football for Darlington in 1885-6 and is remembered as the world's first black professional football player, with this statue at the Football Association's headquarters. He later worked as a miner and died in 1930.

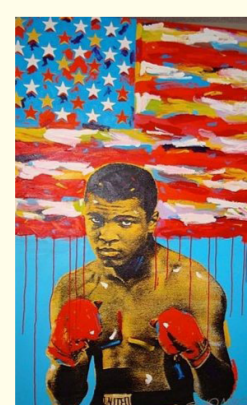
### 15: West Indies Cricket Team and Learie Constantine

The West Indian Cricket team, which included Learie Constantine, toured England, for the third time, in 1923. They played and won against Durham at Darlington. Learie Constantine, MBE (1901–1971) played 18 Test Matches and took the West Indies' first wicket in Test cricket. He was Trinidad's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and became the UK's first black peer in 1969. He challenged racial discrimination, supported the Bristol Bus Boycott and the 1965 Race Relations Act in Britain.



### 16: Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jnr, (1942-2016) nicknamed "The Greatest", won 56 of his 61 boxing matches. He refused to fight in the Vietnam War because it was against his religion and principles. In 1977 he visited youth clubs in Newcastle, toured the city in an open-air bus and he and his new wife, Veronica, had their marriage blessed at the Al Azhar Mosque in South Shields.



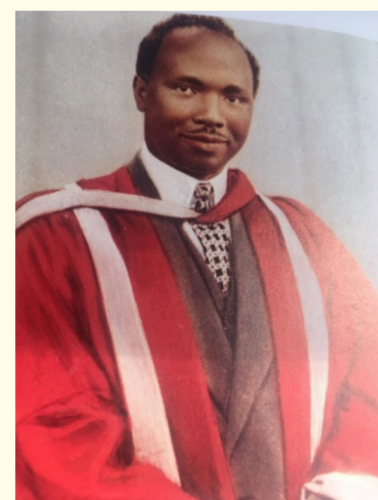
Mohammad Ali pop art painting by John Stango

## MEDICAL PEOPLE



**17: Ishmael Cummings**  
Ishmael Cummings (1882-1977) born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, became a doctor at Newcastle Medical College (Durham University) in 1914. He was a Senior Doctor at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle, and had his own practice at Burnopfield, County Durham. In 1916 he

joined the colonial service as an African Medical Officer in Eastern Nigeria, receiving inferior pay and accommodation to similarly qualified white practitioners. He set up a successful general practice when he returned to Freetown in 1931 and died there in 1977.



**18: Robert Wellesley-Cole**  
Robert Wellesley-Cole (1907-1995), from Freetown, Sierra Leone, graduated from Newcastle Medical College (Durham University) in 1934. He overcame racism to become the first African Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1944. He was called 'the black doctor' with popular practices in Denton Burn and Wickham View, West Newcastle. He had a children's clinic, did minor operations himself and looked after his own patients in hospital. He left Newcastle in 1949 and worked as a doctor in Nottingham, senior doctor and surgeon in Nigeria and Sierra Leone and an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) in London.

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## African Lives in Northern England

We hope you enjoy learning about the many men and women of African descent who have visited and lived in our villages and towns in Northern England. These famous people made life better for people in Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and the USA as well as for us in Northern England. There are many more people of African descent who have lived and are living in Northern England. Many are living ordinary lives, helping their neighbours and work mates; others are famous for sport, writing books, helping communities. Northern England is home to many different people and has been so since Roman times.



This resource has been produced by the African Lives in Northern England Project. contact details [bpq@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:bpq@blueyonder.co.uk)

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