

## Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets – 5

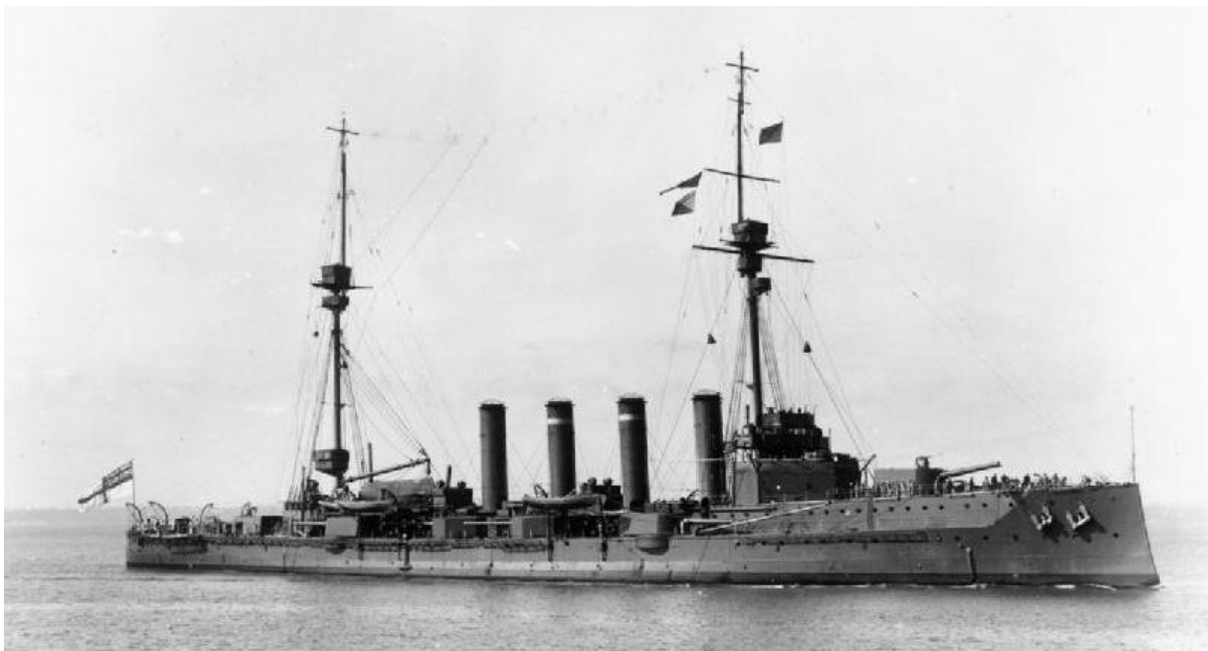
### The Farnhill sailors (and one lucky soldier) – My Boy Jack, by Rudyard Kipling

Given the distance that Farnhill is from the sea, it came as a bit of a surprise when the project found that five of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteers had connections with the Navy. In addition, one of the volunteers had had the unenviable experience of being sunk twice on the same day – and he was a soldier !

**Rupert Edward Barker** – served as an ordinary seaman and deck hand with the Dover Patrol, guarding the English Channel.

Although he appears to have gone through the war unscathed, Rupert's service would certainly not have been without its dangers, as the Dover Patrol was often attacked and took many casualties. They did important work doing anti- submarine patrols and escorting merchant, hospital and troop ships.

**Sidney Biggs** – joined the Navy on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Trained as an engineer, he served as an engine room artificer aboard HMS Cochrane, HMS Monarch, and (post-war) on HMS Renown. He left the service in January 1921.



Sidney Biggs was aboard HMS Cochrane (above) during the Battle of Jutland, which took place on 31<sup>st</sup> May / 1<sup>st</sup> June 1916. However the ship remained unengaged throughout and was one of just two British vessels involved in the battle which did not fire a shot.

**Walter Dawson** – volunteered to serve on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1915 and joined Hawke battalion of the Royal Naval Division. This was an infantry unit set up by the Navy at the start of WW1 from navy and marine reservists and volunteers who were not needed for service at sea.



Walter Dawson was wounded in action, in France, on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1917, and died in a field ambulance two days later, aged 24. He was buried in Aveluy Wood Cemetery, Mesnil-Martinsart, near the town of Albert in Northern France.

**Willie Latham** – joined the Navy on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1915, for the “Period of hostilities”. After three months training he was assigned to one of the navy’s most prestigious vessels – the dreadnought battleship HMS Colossus, stationed with the British Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow, Orkney.

On 31 May 1916, HMS Colossus, under the command of Captain Dudley Pound, took part in the Battle of Jutland. The vessel did not play a major part in the engagement but sustained slight damage, which resulted in injuries to seven men. This was the only hit sustained by any of the dreadnoughts from the main body of the Grand Fleet.

After the battle, Willie Latham sent a message home to his parents. This was published in the West Yorkshire Pioneer a fortnight before news of the battle itself was released to the press. It must have seemed rather incongruous in the circumstances.

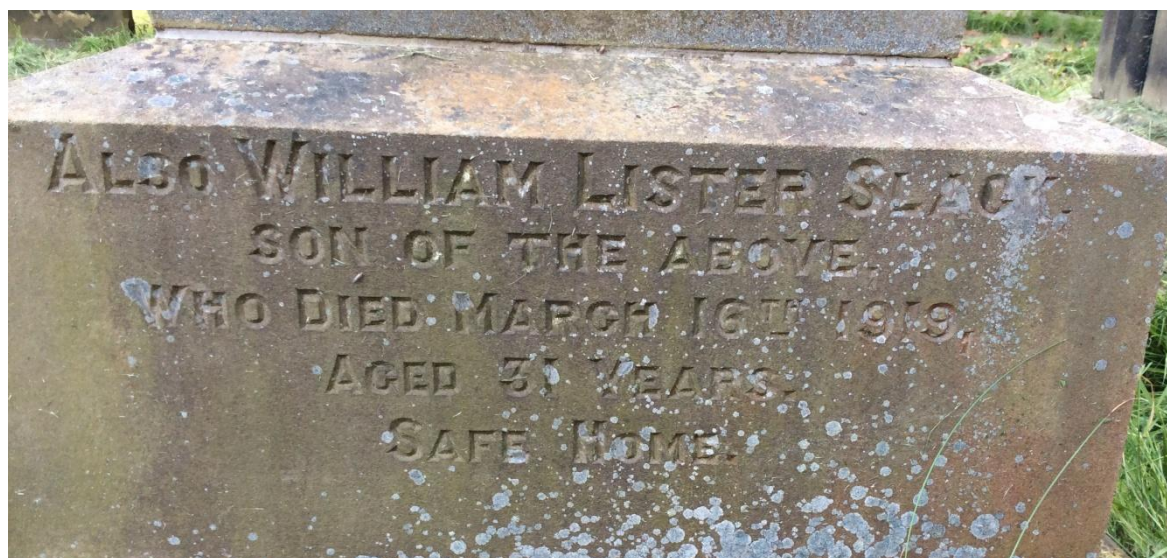
**FARNHILL.**  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Latham have received  
a message from their son, Petty Officer Wm.  
Latham, of the "Colossus," stating that he  
is safe and well.

A few weeks later, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1916, while home on leave, Willie married Elsie Greenwood in a ceremony at St. Andrew's, Kildwick. Shortly after the end of the war the couple moved out of the local area.

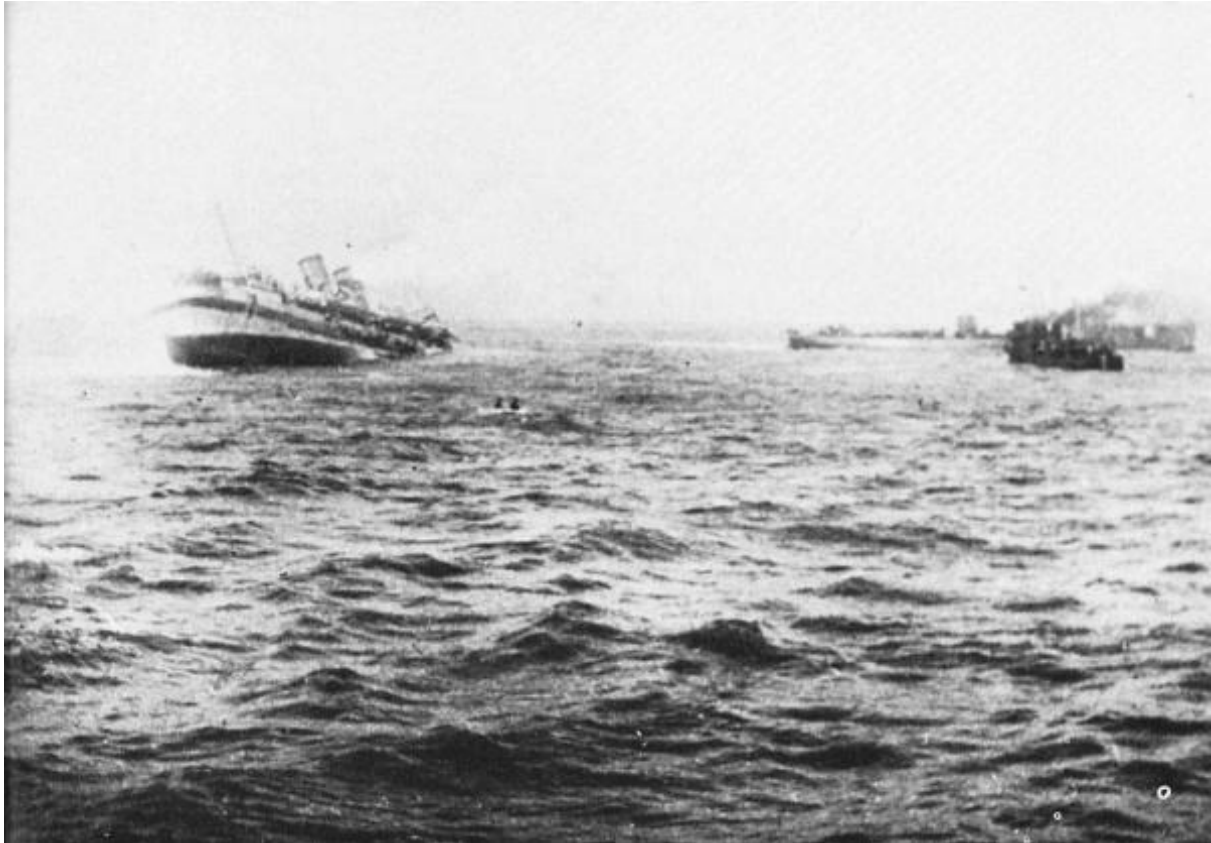
**William Lister Slack** – joined in Merchant Navy in about 1910, when he was in his early 20s, and served throughout the war.

After the war, William returned to Farnhill on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919. He died of influenza on the 16<sup>th</sup>, after having been ill for nine days. He was aged 31.

He was buried in Kildwick churchyard, where the bottom line of the inscription on his gravestone perhaps reflects the time he was at sea: "Safe Home".



**Percy Walmsley** – who served in the Army, narrowly escaped a watery grave twice in the same day. In November 1915, after suffering frostbite, Percy was being brought back to England for treatment when the ship he was on – the hospital ship HMHS Anglia – struck a mine and sank within fifteen minutes. Around 160 men and women died, including men confined to beds below decks and their doctors and nurses.



Percy Walmsley was rescued from the sinking vessel and taken aboard a collier which had come to the rescue. Unfortunately, almost immediately, that ship also hit a mine and sank, and Percy was thrown into the sea.

Finally rescued and taken to hospital in Epsom, Percy was subsequently able to return to front-line duties in France. The story of his remarkable rescue was reported in the newspaper, the *West Yorkshire Pioneer*, where Percy was quoted as saying “*I’d like to have four rounds with the man who laid the mine or fired the torpedo.*”

The precise location of the wreck of the Anglia was identified In October 2014 and, in March 2017, it was declared an official war grave.



Following the disappearance of his son, on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1915, during the Battle of Loos, Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem "My Boy Jack".

The poem is one of mourning, sorrow and regret and, in the end, pride. Because his son was in the Army rather than the Navy, the reference to the wind and tide, which forms a repeated motif throughout the poem, has been interpreted as representing the Battle of Loos – although it could just as easily represent the dangers faced by all the men, fighting on land or sea: men battling the tides of war.

### ***My Boy Jack, by Rudyard Kipling***

"Have you news of my boy Jack?"

*Not this tide.*

"When d'you think that he'll come back?"

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*

"Has any one else had word of him?"

*Not this tide.*

*For what is sunk will hardly swim,*

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*

"Oh, dear, what comfort can I find?"

*None this tide,*

*Nor any tide,*

*Except he did not shame his kind---*

*Not even with that wind blowing, and that tide.*

*Then hold your head up all the more,*

*This tide,*

*And every tide;*

*Because he was the son you bore,*

*And gave to that wind blowing and that tide.*

