

Charles (Charlie) Slack (1889 – 1965)

Charlie Slack was born on Silsden Moor, an area in the hills between Silsden and Bradley, and was one of seven children.

After the death of his father the family moved to Farnhill where, in 1911, Charlie was working as a temporary postman and was also a self-employed boot repairer.

Serving with the 2/6 battalion, Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment during WW1, Charlie obviously suffered severe ill health and was discharged from the army in 1916.



Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

He married – he and his wife had three children – and the family lived in Keighley.

Pre-war life

Charlie Slack was born on 1st March 1889, the third child (and third son) of Richard Henry Slack, a gamekeeper, originally from Skipton, and his wife Lily (nee Catterall), a school teacher, who was from Bolton in Lancashire. They married in 1885 and had seven children, all of whom were born at Stake Hill on Silsden Moor, an area on the hills between Silsden and Bradley:

- Richard, b. 1886
- William Lister, b. 1887
- Charlie, b. 1889
- Martha Ann, b. 1890
- Peter, b. 1892
- George, b. 1893
- Mary, b. 1895



The Slack family on Silsden Moor, c. 1896-7
 Stood at the back: Richard Henry, Lily (holding Mary). Sat on the wall: Peter, William.
 Sat against the wall: Martha Ann, Charles. Stood at front: Richard.

Richard Henry Slack died in 1899 and it seems likely that it was after this that the family moved to 3 Mary Street, Farnhill, which is where they were living at the time of the 1901 census.

Note: A member of the family has told the project that the children were unhappy at the move from Silsden Moor, which provided many opportunities for play, to the more built-up environment of Mary Street and were far happier when the family later moved to Heather Cottage, which backs on to Farnhill Moor.

The census recorded that Lily was “living on her own means” – probably working as a private tutor – and the two eldest boys, Richard (aged 14) and William (aged 13), were both employed as spinners in a woollen mill.

Civil Parish of <i>Farnhill</i>		Ecclesiastical Parish of <i>Killwick</i>		County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District		Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District		Rural District of <i>Skipton</i>		Parliamentary Borough or Division of <i>Skipton</i>		Town- ship
ROAD, STREET, No. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES Uninhabited In Occupation Not in Occupation	Number of Inhabitants	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN			
<i>3 Mary St</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Lily Slack</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>Living on own means</i>			<i>Bellon Lanes</i>			
			<i>Richard do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>Spinner Woollen mill</i>	<i>Worker</i>		<i>York Silsden Moor</i>			
			<i>William do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Spinner Woollen mill</i>	<i>Worker</i>		<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Charlie do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>12</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Peter do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>9</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Mary do.</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>5</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Martha do.</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>10</i>				<i>do do</i>			

Extract from the 1901 census return for Farnhill – the Slack family at 3 Mary Street
 Used under licence from the National Archive

By the time of the 1911 census the family had moved to Heather Cottage on Grange Road, opposite the top of the Arbour. At this time, however, both William and Martha were no longer living at home; Martha was at North Wales Training College, in Bangor, and William had joined the Merchant Navy. Charlie – who was still living at home – was working as a temporary postman and self-employed boot repairer.

WW1 service

Charlie Slack attested his willingness to serve with 6th Reserve battalion, Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment at Skipton on 3rd December 1914. W.B. Whitham who was living in Farnhill throughout the war and knew the Slack family, recorded in his diary that his brother, John Spencer Whitham, went with him to attest – although he recorded the date as being 7th December.

Note: W.B. Whitham got both dates wrong. All the documents confirm that Charlie attested on the 3rd. John Spencer Whitham attested on the 8th.

Charlie was immediately transferred to 2/6 battalion to begin his training, as Private no. 3778.

On 19th November 1915 a newspaper report in the West Yorkshire Pioneer described an event held at Kildwick and Farnhill Institute, arranged to “provide winter comforts for the lads serving with the Colours”. The piece ended with a list of the men who were “to be remembered”, which included Charlie Slack.

Note: W.B. Whitham's record of the whereabouts of his brother suggests that 2/6 battalion Duke of Wellington's were training in Newcastle at this time.

On 31st December 1915 Charlie was admitted to hospital in Newcastle requiring treatment for a goitre on the right-hand side of his neck. The swelling had started about 18 months previously and become progressively worse; he complained of feeling faint when walking upstairs or uphill.

From 5th January 1916 he was treated with tincture of iodine, painted daily on to his neck. He also had his right tonsil removed, as it was infected.

By 21st February the swelling was much reduced, although it was thought likely that this was due to the tonsillectomy.

On 20th March it was reported that the swelling had been brought under control but could not be reduced further. Charlie was also suffering periods of tachycardia (an abnormally rapid heart rate), tremors, and breathlessness on exertion.

On 30th April 1916 Charlie Slack was discharged from the army "in consequence of being no longer physically fit for war service".

No.	3778.	Army Rank	Private
Name	Charlie Slack.		
(The name must agree strictly with that on enlistment, unless changed subsequently by authority.)			
Corps	76th Bn. Duke of Wellington's Regt.		
Battalion, Battery, Company, Depot, &c.	D.		
(If attached to the Regular Establishment of the Special Reserve or Permanent Staff of the Territorial Force, &c., or to General Staff of the Army, it should be so stated.)			
Date of discharge	30.4.1916.		
Place of discharge	Larkhill Camp, Salisbury Plain.		
1.	Description at the time of discharge.		
Age	27	years	2 months
Height	5	feet	1 1/2 inches
Chest measurement	girth when fully expanded		35 ins.
	range of expansion		2 ins.
Complexion	rash		
Eyes	Blue		
Hair	mouse		
Trade	Boot-repairer.		
Intended place of residence	Heaker Cottage		
(To be given as fully as practicable)	Kildwicks		
	W. Keighley.		
(The measurements and description should be carefully taken on the day the man leaves his unit, but in the case of men sent home from abroad for discharge, the age and intended place of residence should be left blank to be filled in by the Officer who confirms the discharge at home.)			
2.	The above-named man is discharged in consequence of being no longer physically fit for war service.		
(The cause of discharge must be worded as prescribed in the King's Regulations and be identical with that on the discharge certificate. If discharged by superior authority, the No. and date of the letter to be quoted.)			

Part of Charlie Slack's Discharge Form
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He was awarded a Silver War Badge (no. 142955), which was despatched to him in February 1917.

Note: Silver War Badges (SWB), sometimes known as the "Discharge Badge", the "Wound Badge" or "Services Rendered Badge", were first issued in September 1916. They were awarded to men who were unable to continue in the services due to illness or wounds sustained. They were intended to be worn on civilian clothing and so counteract the practice of "white-feathering" men who had wounds that rendered them unfit for war service, but which were not obvious from their outward appearance.

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Name	Corps	Reg. No.	Rank	Date of Discharge	Cause of Discharge
Slack C.	W. Rid R 6th Battr.	378 11	Pte	30.4.16 Enlistment 3.12.14	Para 392 XVI K.R. Sickness.

Date of application (a) Badge (b) Medal
No. of File " "

Address of applicant :—

Action taken List T.O/442.

W5658—8733 60,000 8/16 HWV(P913) G16/1202
9189—1123 8 200,000 11/16

Int

Charlie Slack's Silver War Badge card
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Post-war life

Charlie Slack returned to Heather Cottage after his discharge.

In his diary W. B. Whitham recorded him coming home on 17th May 1916 and being presented with a "Leather Brief Bag" (cost 13s 6d) on 16th July. (The reason for this presentation was not recorded.)

On 1st March 1919 Charlie's brother William returned to Farnhill after nine years serving in the Merchant Marine. However tragedy struck and William died of influenza on the 16th, after being ill for nine days. He was buried in Kildwick graveyard, in the same plot as his father.

On 27th December 1920 the 31-year old bachelor Charlie Slack, a labourer from Farnhill, married the 29-year old spinster Elsie Melinda Shackleton, the daughter of a mill manager from Keighley, in Keighley Parish Church. W.B. Whitham acted as Charlie's best man.

The 1921 census records Charlie and Elsie living with Elsie's parents, at 5 Hainworth Road, Keighley, Charlie is employed as a Mechanics Labourer for a company that made textile machines.

In 1926 the couple moved into their own home, at 22 Kensington Street, in 1926. Charlie would live there for the rest of his life.

They had three children, all boys: Peter (born 1924), Donald (born 1926) and Charlie (born 1927).

On 6th January 1936, tragedy struck the Slack family when Charlie's sister, Martha Ann, was found dead of gas poisoning at her home, The School House, in the village of Thorne near Doncaster, where she was headmistress of the local school. According to the report of the inquest into her death, printed in the Craven Herald (10/1/1936), she had previously suffered a "nervous breakdown" and had been treated at a nursing home in Bristol for "delusions". Returning a verdict of suicide, the coroner said "It seems that she could not face another day's work." Martha Ann (known as Sissie) was buried in the plot adjacent to her father and brother, William.



The plinth of Martha Ann Slack's gravestone

On the register compiled in September 1939, when WW2 ration cards were being issued, Charlie and Elsie were recorded as living at 22 Kensington Street with three unnamed others (presumably the three boys), and working in the wool industry.

At the end of 1945 the couple celebrated their silver wedding anniversary, and messages of congratulation from family and friends were printed in the Keighley News (22/12/1945).

SLACK — SHACKLETON. — Loving Greetings to Dad and Mum on the Anniversary of their Silver Wedding, December 27th, 1945.
Loving wishes, fond and true, from those who think the world of you. Peter (S.E.A.C.), Ellen, Donald (H.M.F.), and Charlie.
SLACK—SHACKLETON. — Congratulations to Elsie and Charlie on the Silver Anniversary of their Wedding, December 27th, 1945.
Distance divides. Friendship abides. Martha and Family (Windsor, Ontario).
SMITH — EMMOTT. — Congratula-

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Note: Despite WW2 having ended it appears that Peter was still serving with the South East Asian Command (SEAC) and Donald with His Majesty's Forces, in Europe (HMF). Charlie was only 18 years old.

The "Ellen" mentioned was Peter's wife. They had married earlier in 1945.

Charlie Slack died on 20th April 1965. He was aged 75.

Postscript

After her husband's death Elsie Slack continued to live at 22 Kensington Street, Keighley, with son Donald, until at least 1977. She died, somewhere in the Bradford area, in 1984.

In an acknowledgement message published in the Keighley News shortly after his death, Charlie Slack was referred to as "a very dear father and loving grandad". It is possible that descendants still live in the local area.

Charlie Slack – a life in summary

Born: 1/3/1889, Silsden Moor
Baptised: 6/8/1890, Silsden St. James
Died: 20/4/1965 **Aged:** 76
Home address: 22 Kensington St, Keighley

Parents

Father: Richard Henry; b. 5/7/1863, Skipton; d. 27/11/1899, Silsden Moor
Mother: Lily (nee Catterall); b. 11/6/1858, Bolton le Moors; bapt. 13/6/1858, Bolton le Moors;
d. 6/8/1941, Farnhill
Married: 24/12/1885, Cononley

Siblings

Richard; b. 28/9/1886, Silsden Moor; m. Alice Smith, 1/8/1922, Zion Chapel Bingley;
d. 3/1/1965, Bingley
William Lister; b. 26/12/1887, Silsden Moor; d. 16/3/1919, Farnhill
Martha Ann; b. 17/5/1890, Silsden Moor; d. 6/1/1936, Thorne (nr. Doncaster)
Peter; b. 3/1/1892, Silsden Moor; m. Mary Whitham, 28/9/1920, Silsden Wesleyan Chapel;
d. 25/5/1975, Keighley
George; b. 16/5/1893, Silsden Moor; d. 18/5/1893 (aged 2 days)
Mary; b. 5/10/1895, Silsden Moor; m. Joseph Snowden, 3/6/1922, Silsden;
d. 1963, Worth Valley (Registration district)

WW1 service

Service period: 3/12/1914 to 30/04/1916
Regt.: 2/6 battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regt. (Private, no. 3778)
Medals: Silver War Badge
Home address: Heather Cottage, Grange Road, Farnhill

Relationship to other volunteers

Richard Slack – brother
William Lister Slack – brother
Peter Slack – brother

Marriage

Wife: Elsie Melinda Shackleton; b. 18/12/1891, Keighley; d. 1984, Bradford (Registration district)
Date: 27/12/1920, at Keighley Parish Church

Children

Peter R., b. 17/7/1924, Keighley (Registration district);

m. Ellen Patrickson, 1945, Keighley (Registration district)

Donald, b. 1926, Keighley (Registration district)

Charlie B., b. 1927, Keighley (Registration district);

m. Kathleen Shellabear, 1955, Worth Valley (Registration district)

