

Peter Slack (1892 – 1975)

Richard Slack, a gamekeeper, did not live long enough to witness the horrors of World War 1 but his wife, Lily, would have many an anxious moment as, one after the other, four of her sons volunteered to serve.

Peter, her fourth son, was born in the area known as Silsden Moor and, after the family moved to Farnhill, he attended Kildwick School, where it appears he was an above average scholar.



Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

As a young man he was on the management committee of the Institute and acted as treasurer.

Peter Slack became a corporal in the West Yorkshire Regiment and served in France. At the end of the war he returned to Farnhill becoming, again, very much involved in village life when he was appointed secretary to Farnhill Parish Council and treasurer to Kildwick Old Boys' Football Club.

After marrying and living in Keighley he worked for Keighley Corporation Waterworks and he and his wife had two children – a son who died when he was eighteen, and a daughter who remained unmarried.

Peter Slack died, aged 83, in 1975.

Pre-war life

Peter Slack was born on 3rd January 1892, the fifth child (and fourth 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, &c., and No. or NAME OF HOUSE	HOUSES No. of Uninhabited No. of Occupied No. in Multiple Tenement Buildings	Number of Inhabitants Males Females	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Sex M F	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>W</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>Living on own means</i>			<i>Bellon Lanes</i>			
			<i>Richard do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</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>S</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Spinner Woollen mill</i>	<i>Worker</i>		<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Charlie do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>12</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Peter do.</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>9</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Mary do.</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>5</i>				<i>do do</i>			
			<i>Martha do.</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>10</i>				<i>do do</i>			

Extract from the 1901 census return for Farnhill – the Slack family at 3 Mary Street
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The younger siblings were all still attending Kildwick school, where Peter was an above average pupil, winning a number of school prizes and commendations for good attendance. He may even have considered teaching as a possible future career.

1903.
May 1st. The following children have attended on every possible occasion ^{viz (42)} during the past year:-
Mary & Martha Slack, Mary J & Harry Kinson, F Boddy, Elsie Walker, Maggie Mosley, C. Peate, A Walmsley & C Barritt - The following children made 419 attendances, being absent on one occasion only, A Mosley, A. Haygreaves & P. Slack -

" 8. The results of the competition for the best collection of Wild Flowers (pressed and mounted) were declared to day. Miss Slingsby's prize is awarded to Morris Jones & P. Slack & I. Blant take the 2nd & 3rd Prizes

Oct. 19th. Prizes were presented this afternoon for the best collections of pressed wild flowers. Miss Slingsby presented them. Her prize (1st) was won by Peter Slack. The Best Teacher's prizes (2nd & 3rd) were won by Irvin Blant & Aineé Mosley respectively

Dec 22nd. The Vicar (the Correspondent) visited the School this morning, & presented the following prizes given by Messrs. Owbridge Lth to the undermentioned children for painting competition:-
1st Prize:- Watch - Peter Slack
2nd Do Needle Case. Aineé Mosley.
3rd Do. Painting Book. Harry Walmsley
4th Do. Painting Book. Lily Green
A book was also given to Willie Barker for most progress in his class.

Kildwick School log entries - 1st May, and 8th October 1903; 19th October 1904; 22nd December 1905 -
Peter Slack winning prizes.

By kind permission of Kildwick school

" 19. The School Attendance Officer visited to-day & noted two absentees.

St III were in charge of Peter Slack this morning for reading etc. This boy has applied for the position of monitor.

July 2nd Peter Slack commenced work as a monitor in this school to-day. He assists with St. III. in the mornings. & studies in the afternoons.

" 18. Received notification of the success of Peter Slack at the examination for Intending Pupil Teacher held in May last by the West Riding Education Committee.

Kildwick School log entries – 19th June, 2nd and 18th July 1906 –
Peter Slack becomes class monitor and applies to become a pupil teacher.
By kind permission of Kildwick school

By the time of the 1911 census however, the 19 year-old Peter Slack was working as a clerk in the office of a cotton manufacturer.

It was probably around this time that he joined Kildwick and Farnhill Institute.

WW1 service

It is certain that Peter Slack saw service with the army in France during WW1, but when his service started is unclear. Local news reports recorded him as being present in the village until October 1916.

He certainly attended the annual meeting of Kildwick and Farnhill Institute in October 1914, when he was elected to the management committee (Keighley News, 17/10/1914). At the next annual meeting Peter delivered the treasurer's report and was appointed to a committee looking into the possibility of creating a scheme to provide "comforts" for men from Farnhill who were serving with the forces (Keighley News, 16/10/1915). He also gave the treasurer's report at the 1916 meeting (West Yorkshire Pioneer, 20/10/1916), when he was again elected to the committee.

The British army WWI medal rolls and associated index cards provide a substantially complete record of the men who served in the army. They suggest that only one man called Peter Slack served in that period. However, the cards and roll do not provide sufficient information to definitively identify a particular individual – they do not include a home address, occupation, or date of birth for example. However *if* we assume that the sole extant medal card and roll entry does indeed refer to the Peter Slack of Heather Cottage, Farnhill, it is possible to provide a fragmentary account of his WW1 career.

Name.	Corps.	Rank	Regtl. No.
W SLACK.	W. York. R.	Cpl.	38374
Peter.			

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	0/2/104	B18. 2185.	66. 41. 14. 2. 19
BRITISH			
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1380.

WW1 Medal Card for Cpl. Peter Slack, West Yorkshire Regiment (service no. 38374) – possibly the Farnhill WW1 Volunteer
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On 11/11/18 or on becoming non-effective		NAME	Unit previously served with. Regtl. No. and Rank in same on entry into theatre of war	From	To
Regtl. No.	Rank				
38374.	Cpl.	SLACK Peter	16th W. York. R. 38374.	✓	—
			Cpl.		
			Attd. 3rd Entrenching Bn. 38374.		
			15/17 W. Yks. R. 38374.		✓

Extract from the WW1 Medal Roll for the West Yorkshire Regiment
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Corporal Peter Slack began his military service with the 16th battalion (1st Bradford) West Yorkshire Regiment which, from March 1916 to February 1918, was stationed in France.

After the 16th battalion was disbanded, Peter spent February and March 1918 attached to the 3rd Entrenching battalion.

Note: Entrenching battalions were short-lived units formed early in 1918, when a reorganisation of the army in France led to a temporary surplus of infantry manpower. These battalions were put to use in improving the existing defences in anticipation of a German offensive. They were disbanded in April 1918.

Peter subsequently served with 15/17th battalion, which was formed by the merging of the 15th and 17th battalions in December 1917.

His active service ended on 14th February 1919 (the only date we can be sure of), when he was transferred to the Class Z reserves. This reserve contingent consisted of discharged, previously enlisted soldiers. The Z Reserve was abolished in 1920.

Peter Slack subsequently received the British War Medal and Victory Medal in acknowledgement of his war service.

Post-war life

On his discharge from the army Peter Slack returned to Heather Cottage in time to be included on the electoral roll for Autumn 1919, compiled earlier in the year.

On 1st March 1919 Peter's brother William also 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. Peter reported the death.

William was buried in Kildwick graveyard, in the same plot as his father.

Peter seems to have become almost immediately involved in village life. On 15th April 1919 he was appointed as secretary to Farnhill Parish Council.

Parish Council.—The first meeting of the new Council was held in the Institute on Tuesday evening. Mr. W. A. Brigg was unanimously re-elected chairman. Mr. W. E. Biggs was elected vice-chairman. Mr. T. Appleby resigned the position of clerk, and Mr. Peter Slack was appointed successor. Finance Committee elected were Messrs. P. G. Baldwin, W. E. Biggs, and A. Ellis; Lighting—Messrs. T. Latham, W. Green, and T. Wrathall.—After a discussion on housing Mr. George Holliday, from the Ex-Soldiers and Sailors' Association, gave his views on "Small-holdings."

Report of Farnhill Parish Council Annual Meeting, 15/4/1919

By kind permission of Craven Herald

Note: The minutes of Farnhill Parish Council recorded that he was employed at a salary of £5 per annum.

A little over a fortnight later he became treasurer of the newly-reformed Kildwick Old Boys' Football Club.

KILDWICK & FARNHILL.
Old Boys' Football Club.—A general meeting was held in the Kildwick and Farnhill Unionist Club on Friday evening.

When war broke out it was thought best to suspend the Club during hostilities, as many of the members had joined the Colours. With the exception of one the whole of the forty registered playing members of 1913/14 have seen service, six having died for their country, many others having been wounded. A vote of condolence with the relatives of those who have died was passed by the meeting.

The following officers were elected:—President the Rev. C. E. Hodge, Vicar of Kildwick; vice-presidents, Messrs. J. E. Walker, T. H. Sudden, J. J. Nelson, W. Fearnley, W. Bamitt, F. Appleby, W. Sunderland junr., H. Smith, and H. Slater; secretary, Mr. A. D. A. Dawson; treasurer, Mr. P. Slack; committee, Messrs. E. Pollard, J. Hargreaves, B. Holmes, W. Dixon, J. Tolson, S. Holmes, C. Peake, and J. Burrow.

Extracts from the report on the reforming of Kildwick Old Boys' Football Club – 2/5/1919
 By kind permission of Craven Herald

On 28th September 1920 Peter Slack married Mary Whitham, of Silsden, in Silsden Wesleyan Chapel. The couple set up home in Keighley, at 6 West Bank.

1920. Marriage solemnized at <u>Wesleyan Chapel Silsden</u> in the District of <u>Shipston</u> in the County of <u>York</u>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
17	Twenty-eighth day of September 1920	Peter Slack	28 years	Bachelor	Clerk	Heather Cottage, Farnhill	Richard Henry Slack	Retired
		Mary Whitham	25 years	Spinster	Clerk in woollen mill	47 Browfield St. North, Silsden	John William Whitham	Warp Dresser
Married in the <u>Wesleyan Chapel</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Wesleyan Methodists</u> by Certificate								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		{ <u>Peter Slack</u> <u>Mary Whitham</u> }		In the Presence of us, { <u>Robert Street</u> <u>Almy Whitham</u> }		And in the Presence of { <u>G. H. Lindley</u> Authorized Person for the said Chapel		

Slack – Whitham marriage certificate
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In the 1921 census Peter was recorded as working as a clerk in Keighley Town Hall, for Keighley Corporation Waterworks. He would eventually become its Superintendent of Distribution.

Peter and Mary had two children. A son, Derek, born 27th April 1925; and a daughter, Mary, born 25th November 1930.

Both the children were born when the family were living at 6 West Bank, Keighley, but by 1933 they had moved the short distance to number 2.

On 6th January 1936, tragedy struck the Slack family when Peter'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

By the time the 1939 Register was compiled at the start of WW2, to enable ration cards to be issued, the Slack family had moved to 92 Braithwaite Road, Keighley; it would be Peter and Mary's home for the rest of their lives. Peter was listed as a waterworks superintendent and an ARP warden at the waterworks.

Slack Peter	M	3 Jan 92	M	Waterworks Superintendent	A.R.P. Waterworks
Slack Mary	F	10 Nov 95	M	Unpaid Domestic duties	
Slack Derek A.	M	27 Apr 25	S	At School	
Slack Mary (Gummit)	F	25 Nov 30	S	At School	

Extract from the 1939 Register entry for 92 Braithwaite Road, Keighley
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A second tragedy struck the family in 1943 when Peter and Mary's son, Derek, died aged 18.

Peter Slack died, of heart disease, in Airedale Hospital, on 27th May 1975; he was aged 83. The death was reported by his daughter, Mary, who was at the bedside.

Postscript

After Peter's death his wife, Mary, continued to live at 92 Braithwaite Road, Keighley, until she died on 11th April 1977 at the age of 81.

Peter and Mary's daughter, Mary, did not marry. She died, in Keighley, in December 1993.

Many of Peter's siblings married and had children, and their descendants are known to be still living in the local area.

Peter Slack – a life in summary

Born: 3/1/1892, Silsden Moor

Died: 25/5/1975, Airedale Hospital **Aged:** 83

Home address: 92 Braithwaite Road, 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

Charlie; b. 1/3/1889, Silsden Moor; m. Elsie Melinda Shackleton, 27/12/1920, Keighley PC;
d. 20/04/1965, Keighley

Martha Ann; b. 17/5/1890, Silsden Moor; d. 6/1/1936, Thorne (nr. Doncaster)

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: *start date unknown*; end date 14/2/1919 (?)

Regt: The Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment; Corporal, no. 38374 (?)

Medals: British War Medal, Victory Medal

Home address: Heather Cottage, Grange Road, Farnhill

Relationship to other volunteers

Richard Slack – brother

William Lister Slack – brother

Charles (Charlie) Slack – brother

Marriage

Wife: Mary Whitham; b. 10/11/1895, Addingham; d. 11/4/1977, Keighley

Date: 28/9/1920, at Silsden Wesleyan Chapel

Children

Derek A.; b. 27/4/1925, Keighley; d. 1943, Keighley

Mary; b. 25/11/1930, Keighley; d. 29/12/1993, Keighley

