

Richard Slack (1886 – 1965)

Richard Slack was born on Silsden Moor, an area in the hills between Silsden and Bradley, and was one of seven children. The family moved to Farnhill when his father, Richard senior, died.

The young Richard, after being employed as a spinner, became a joiner.

In WW1 he served with the Royal Flying Corps and, later, with the RAF. He also served with the RAF again in WW2.

After the war he married and went to live in Bingley, where he lived for the rest of his life.



Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

Pre-war life

Richard Slack was born on 28th September 1886, the eldest child 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	Ecclesiastical Parish	County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District	Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District	Rural District	Parliamentary Borough or Division	Town
of <i>Farnhill</i>	of <i>Killdick</i>	of <i>Farnhill</i>	of <i>Farnhill</i>	of <i>Skipton</i>	of <i>Skipton</i>	of <i>Skipton</i>
ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN
3 Mary St	1	Lily Slack	Head	42	Living on own means	Bellon Lanes
		Richard do.	Son	14	Spinner Woollen mill	York Silsden Moor
		William do.	Son	13	Spinner Woollen mill	do do
		Charles do.	Son	12		do do
		Peter do.	Son	9		do do
		Mary do.	Daughter	5		do do
		Martha do.	Daughter	10		do do

Extract from the 1901 census return for Farnhill – the Slack family at 3 Mary Street
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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.

Richard – who was still living at home – was employed as a joiner.

WW1 service

Richard Slack served in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), the forerunner of the RAF, and then subsequently with the RAF itself, when it was formed on 1st April 1918.

He began his service with the RFC on 14th August 1916, signing on for the duration of the war, although his service record suggests that he may have transferred into the RFC from the army (the information is confusing). He was given the rank of Air Mechanic 2nd class (service number 43301) – later rising to A/M 1st class on 1st April 1917 and Corporal Mechanic on 1st September 1918.

He was employed as a “rigger”. Presumably this involved using his civilian skills as a joiner to help keep the flimsy-looking wood and canvas machines used by the RFC and early RAF airworthy.

Although the service records have no information about his early career in the RFC, it is clear that by the end of the war Richard was serving with 101 Squadron. This squadron was formed at Farnborough on 12th July 1917. Two weeks later it moved to France to operate as a night bomber squadron. In March 1919 the squadron returned to the UK and was disbanded on 31st December 1919.

Richard Slack was transferred to the RAF reserve on 6th May 1919. He was finally discharged on 30th April 1920. He subsequently received a Victory Medal and a British War Medal in recognition of his service.

Post-war life

Richard returned to Heather Cottage in time to be included on the electoral roll for Autumn 1919, compiled earlier in the year. By this time his brothers Charlie and Peter had already returned to the village following their military service. William, another brother, had returned from the Merchant Marine and had died, of influenza, on 16th March.

3 CURRENT ENGAGEMENT IN H.M. FORCES :—

(a) State whether in Army, Navy or R.A.F. Army.

(b) Period :—

Boy Service

Man Service

Date Current Engagement commenced	Age at that Date	Duration of Period of Engagement
<u>14. 8. 16.</u>	<u>29 1/2.</u>	<u>5 of W.</u>

(c) Date of actual entry into { R.F.C. 14 Aug. 1916.
R.N.A.S.
R.A.F. 1 April 1918.

(d) Period engagement extended for

(e) Period re-engaged for

4 PRIOR ENGAGEMENT IN H.M. FORCES :—

Unit	Period		Rank on Discharge
	From	To	

5 CIVILIAN OCCUPATION

(a) Description Joiner

(b) Name and Address of last Employer

(c) Period employed there, from to

6 MARRIAGE

(a) Date Town

(b) Whether verified from Marriage Certificate

(c) Whether with permission

7 PERSON TO BE INFORMED OF CASUALTIES

Name Lily Slack
Address Heather Cottage, Kildwick, Riggley
Relationship Mother. York.

8 DESCRIPTION ON ENGAGEMENT IN H.M. FORCES

Height 5 feet 6 inches. Chest 35 1/2. inches.

Colour of { Hair
Eyes
Complexion

Marks, Wounds or Scars

9 4. TRANSFER TO R.A.F. RESERVE Date 6-5-19 A3/373

10 DISCHARGE D Date 30. 4. 20

The 1921 census records Richard as living at home with his mother and two sisters. He was employed as a joiner, working for a company based in Grassington.

On 1st August 1922 the 35-year old bachelor Richard Slack, a joiner from Farnhill, married the 40-year old spinster Alice Smith, an elementary school teacher from Bingley, in the Bingley Zion Chapel.

19 22. Marriage solemnized at <u>Zion Chapel, St. John Street, Bingley</u> in the District of <u>Keighley</u> in the County of <u>York (West Riding)</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.
38	First	Richard	35	Bachelor	Joiner	Heather Cottage	Richard	Butcher
	August	Slack	years		(Journeyman)	Kildwick	Henry	(Deceased)
	19 22	Alice	40	Spinster	Elementary School Teacher	2, Percy Street Bingley	William Henry Smith	General Dealer
Married in the <u>Zion Chapel</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Primitive Methodists</u> by <u>Certificate</u> This Marriage was solemnized between us, { <u>Richard Slack</u> } in the Presence of us, { <u>William Henry Smith</u> } And in the Presence of { <u>William Turner</u> } { <u>Alice Smith</u> } { <u>Margaret Lambert</u> } Authorized Person for <u>the said Chapel</u>								

Slack – Smith marriage certificate
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The couple set up home with Alice's father, William Henry Smith, at 2 Percy Street, Bingley – it seems likely that she was the only one of the family's children still living at home; her mother had died in 1920. Richard and Alice would live there for the rest of their lives.



Alice Smith
Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

William Henry Smith died on 30th January 1926, and Richard and Alice's only child, a daughter called Margaret, was born later that year.

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

The 1939 Register, taken at the start of WW2 to enable ration cards to be issued, recorded the three members of the Slack family living at 2 Percy Street, Bingley. Richard was employed as a joiner in the building trade.

Note: Richard also taught wood-working and joinery at a night-class.



Richard Slack's toolbox
Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

Richard returned to service in the RAF during WW2. He was initially stationed at RAF Kirkham, near Blackpool, which opened in 1940 as a training camp for RAF tradesmen. He was subsequently moved to Weston-super-Mare, where there was an RAF station, a technical school, and an aircraft manufacturing facility.

Richard's wife, Alice, died on 11th August 1953; she was aged 71.

Richard Slack died, of pneumonia, in Victoria Hospital, Keighley, on 3rd January 1965; he was aged 78. The following acknowledgement appeared later in the Keighley News.

SLACK. — January 3. (in hospital). of 2 Percy Street. Bingley. Richard. aged 78 years. the beloved husband of the late Alice Slack. Cremation took place at Scholern Moor Crematorium on Thursday. January 7.

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Postscript

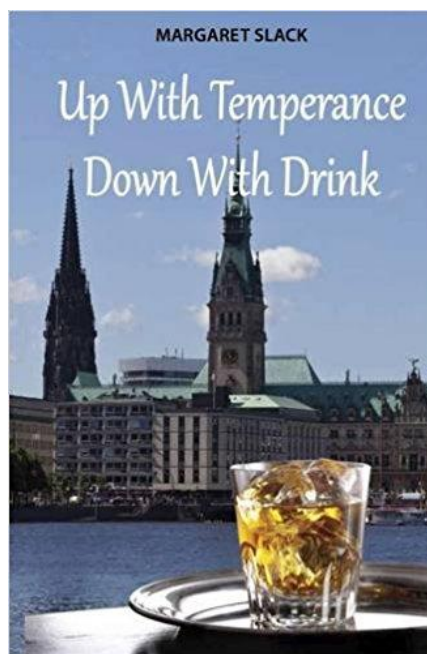
Margaret Slack, Richard and Alice's daughter, became a history teacher in Todmorden and later, after taking early retirement, took up a career as an author.



Margaret Slack – c. 1935
Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

She had a number of books published – on cookery and the landscapes of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Her final book was a novel called “Up with Temperance, Down with Drink”.



Cover of Margaret Slack's novel
[From Amazon](#)

Margaret Slack did not marry and died, in Silsden, in 2016.

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

Richard Slack – a life in summary

Born: 28/9/1886, Silsden Moor
Baptised: 25/4/1887, Silsden St. James
Died: 3/1/1965, Victoria Hospital, Keighley **Aged:** 78
Home address: 2 Percy Street, Bingley

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

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)
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: 14/8/1916 to 30/4/1920
Service: Royal Flying Corps / Royal Air Force (Air Mechanic; no. 43301)
Medals: Victory Medal, British War Medal
Home address: Heather Cottage, Grange Road, Farnhill

Relationship to other volunteers

William Lister Slack – brother
Charlie Slack – brother
Peter Slack – brother

Marriage

Wife: Alice Smith; b. 29/1/1882, Bingley; d. 11/8/1953, Bingley
Date: 1/8/1922, at Zion Chapel, Bingley

Children

Margaret; b. 1926, Bingley; d. 26/8/2016, Silsden

