

# William Lister Slack (1887 – 1919)

William Lister Slack (known as Billy) was born on Silsden Moor, an area in the hills between Silsden and Bradley, and was one of seven children.

After the death of William's father the family moved to Farnhill and, when he was 13, William was employed as a spinner. He joined the Merchant Navy and served for nine years, including all throughout WW1.

William died of influenza in 1919, just three weeks after returning to the village, and was buried with his father in Kildwick churchyard.

His sister, Martha Ann, a schoolteacher in South Yorkshire, who took her own life in 1936, is buried in an adjacent plot.



Photograph courtesy of Mollie Desort

## Pre-war life

William Lister Slack was born on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1887, the second 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, 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.

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>Kildwick</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 or Village		
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		
		Uninhabited	Number of Inhabitants			Condition of Person	Sex	Male	Female	Employer, Worker, or Own account		If Working at Home		
<i>3 Mary St</i>		<i>1</i>		<i>Lily Slack</i>		<i>Head</i>	<i>Wid</i>		<i>42</i>	<i>Living on own means</i>			<i>Bolton Lanes</i>	
				<i>Richard do</i>		<i>Son</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>11</i>		<i>Spinner Woollen Mill</i>		<i>Worker</i>	<i>York Silsden Bur</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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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.

## WW1 service

William joined in Merchant Navy in about 1910 (he would have been in his early 20s) and served throughout the war.

In November 1915 his name appeared in a news report of an event held at Farnhill Institute to raise funds "to provide winter comforts for the lads serving with the Colours". Apart from this, however, no further records have been found of William's wartime service.

## Post-war life

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. His brother Peter reported the death.

REGISTRATION DISTRICT				SKIPTON					
1919 DEATH in the Sub-district of Kildwick				in the County of Yorks (W.R.)					
Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
	<i>Sixteenth March 1919 212 Heather Cottage Farnhill Skipton W.R.</i>	<i>William Lister Slack</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>31 years</i>	<i>Fireman on Steam Tressel</i>	<i>D Influenza 9 days &amp; Septicæmia Certified by W. B. G. B.</i>	<i>Peter Slack Brother Heather Cottage Farnhill</i>	<i>Sixteenth March 1919</i>	<i>M. D. Slater Registrar.</i>

William Lister Slack's death certificate  
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News of his death was reported in the Craven Herald (21/3/1919)

**A Sad Blow.**—Much sympathy is felt in the village for Mrs. Slack, of Heather Cottage, on the death of her son William, who, after nine years in the Mercantile Service, returned home on March 1st.

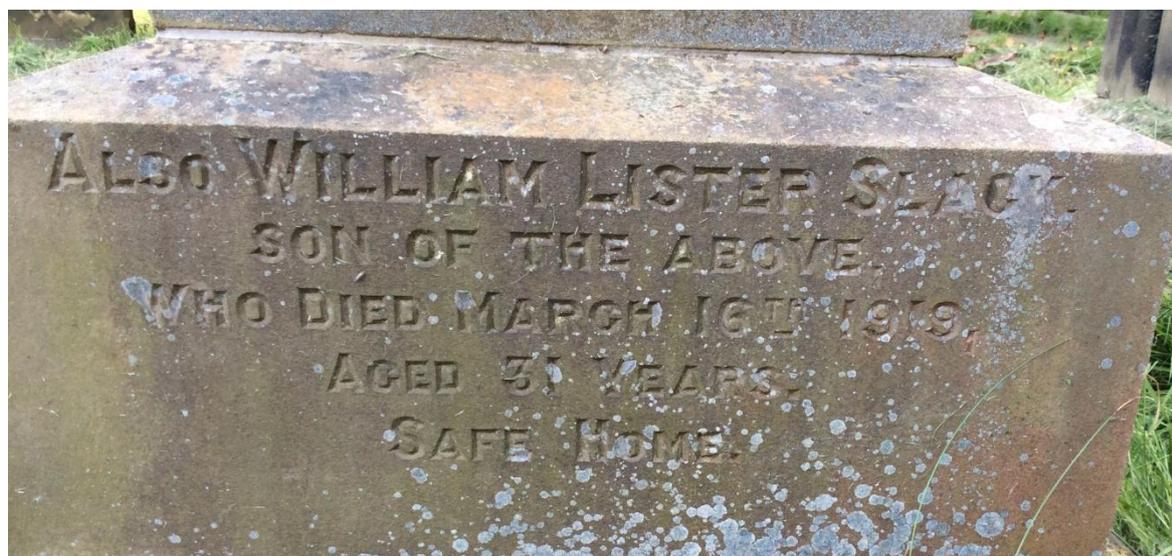
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He was buried with his father in Kildwick churchyard.



Photograph of Richard Henry and William Lister Slack's grave – in Kildwick old graveyard

The wording on the plinth possibly reflects William's time away from home.



The plinth of the Slack grave – William Slack, "Safe Home"

The same feeling was reflected in the diary of W.B. Whitham, a friend of the family, who wrote:

*Funeral of Billy Slack at Kildwick. Been away from home 9 years and comes home to die.*

## Postscript

William Lister Slack's name was not included on the Kildwick War Memorial, unveiled in 1921.

Heather Cottage remained the Slack family home until the death of Lily Slack on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1941. She was buried with her husband and William, in Kildwick churchyard. Prior to that, in the 1920s, all of William's siblings had married and left home.

On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1936, Martha Ann Slack was found dead of gas poisoning at her home, The School House, in the village of Thorne near Doncaster. 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.



The plinth of Martha Ann Slack's gravestone

Many of William's other siblings are known to have had children and it is possible that their descendants still live in the local area.

## William Lister Slack – a life in summary

**Born:** 26/12/1887, Silsden Moor  
**Baptised:** 2/9/1888; St. Paul's, Southport  
**Died:** 16/3/1919, Farnhill                      **Aged:** 31

### 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  
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)

### Relationship to other volunteers

Richard Slack – brother  
Charlie Slack – brother  
Peter Slack – brother

### WW1 service

Mercantile Marine

**Home address:** Heather Cottage, Grange Rd, Farnhill

