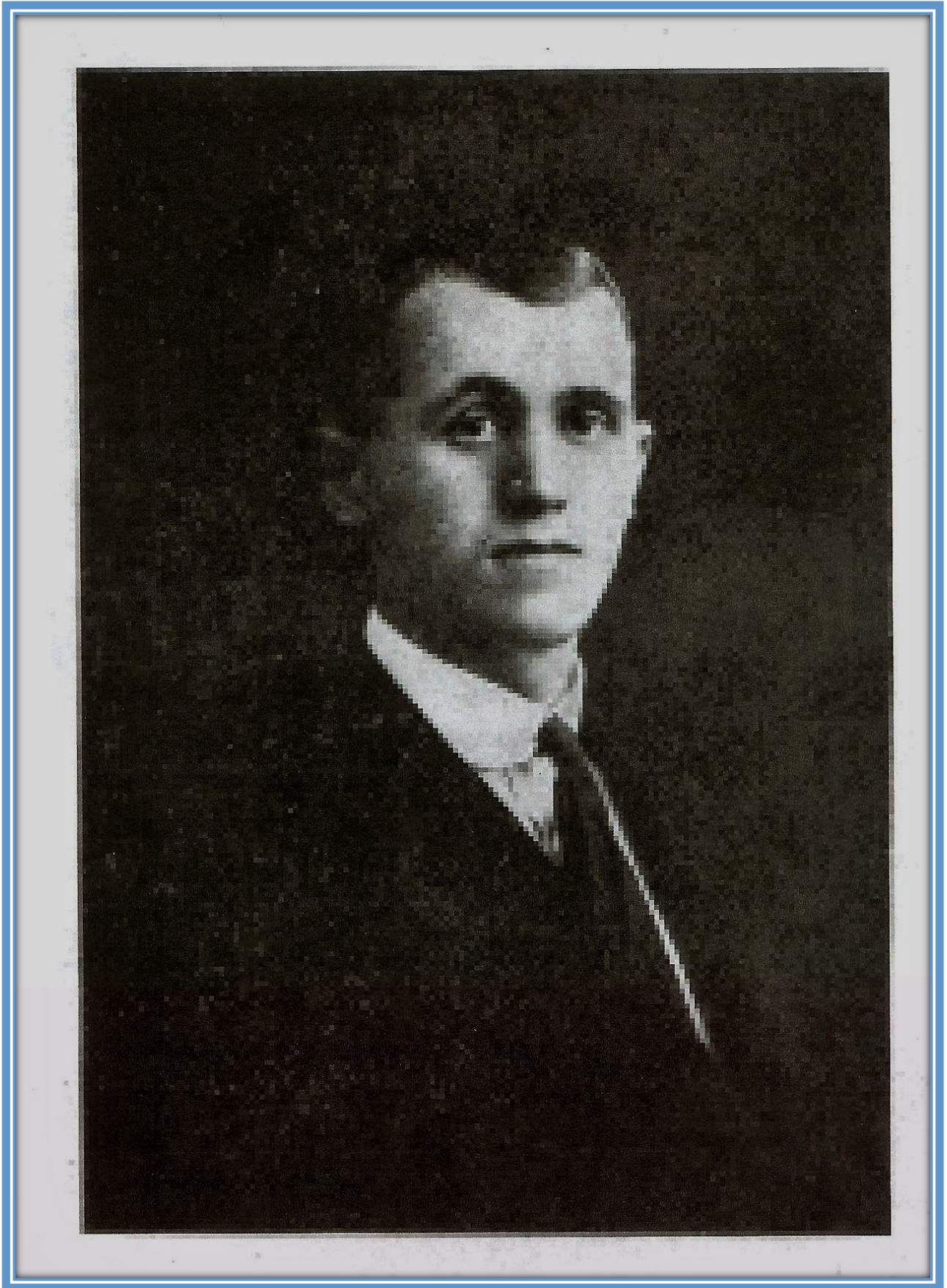


# Hugh Morton

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Photograph from the London Scottish Gazette July 1915

Hugh Morton was born in Bow Middlesex in 1889. His father was also called Hugh Morton and he was born in 1844 in Galston Ayrshire. He was the son of a Scottish Hill farmer called John Morton, who owned Brancefield Farm, which stood in 90 acres of land in Ayrshire. Hugh Morton's wife Jessie Morton, nee Wilson was born in Dumfries-shire, Scotland in 1848.

In 1871, Hugh aged 27 and Jessie aged 23 were already running a draper's business at 43, New Road, Mile End Tower Hamlets employing two men and one boy. They had two small children, John aged 2 and Agnes aged 9 months.

In 1891, Hugh Morton senior was running a draper's business at 40 Bow Road Bromley Bow. He and Jessie now had eight children, John born in 1869; Agnes Jane born 1870; Jessie Isabel born 1873; James Robert born 1876; Benjamin born 1877; Alexander born 1880, Grace born 1888 and Hugh, their youngest child born in 1889. John their eldest child, aged 21 had joined the business and he was employed as a draper's assistant. Also living at the property were Elizabeth McMorrene a visitor, George D Hyslop a draper's Assistant and Cecilia Bottomley a domestic servant.

In 1901, the draper's business (specialising in Linen) and Morton family home was at 13, Mornington Road, Bromley Bow. Only 3 children, Alexander aged 21; Grace aged 13 and Hugh aged 12 were still living at home. There was also another draper's shop belonging to the family at 187, Bow Road.

In 1903, Hugh aged 13 became a scholar at Coopers' Company and Coborn School (founded in 1536) in Tredegar Square, Mile End London. Hugh joined the school's Army Cadet Corps and was a member until he left the school in 1908.

Hugh Morton senior died on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1906 aged 62 when young Hugh was just 16 years old. Probate was granted to his widow Jessie Morton, his eldest son John Morton, also a draper and James Robert Morton M.B., his second eldest son.

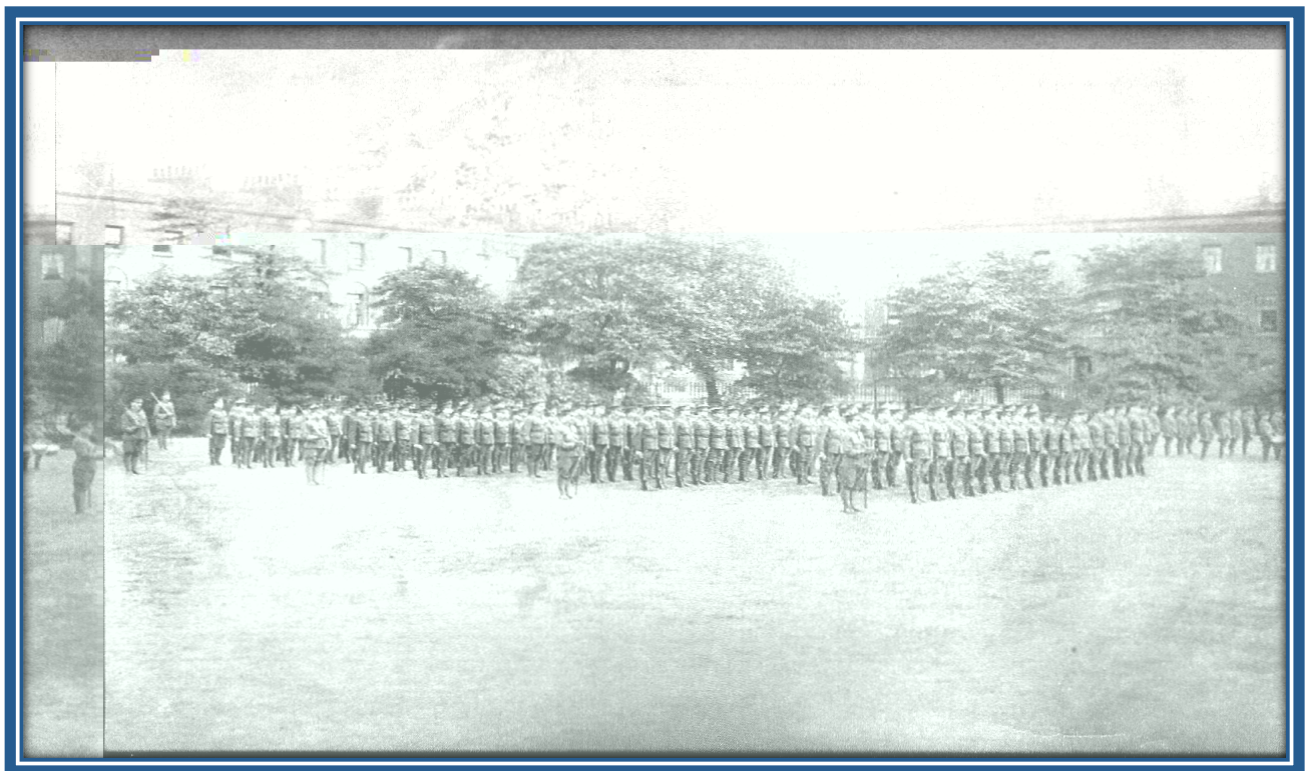
Hugh Morton senior left effects to his family which amounted to the sum of £5723 -7s-6d.





Coopers' School, (Boys), Bow. E.

*Photos courtesy of Coopers' Company and Coborn School Upminster*



*The School's Army Cadet Corps*



## Morton Family Drapers



*An illustration of a typical Victorian Draper's Shop*

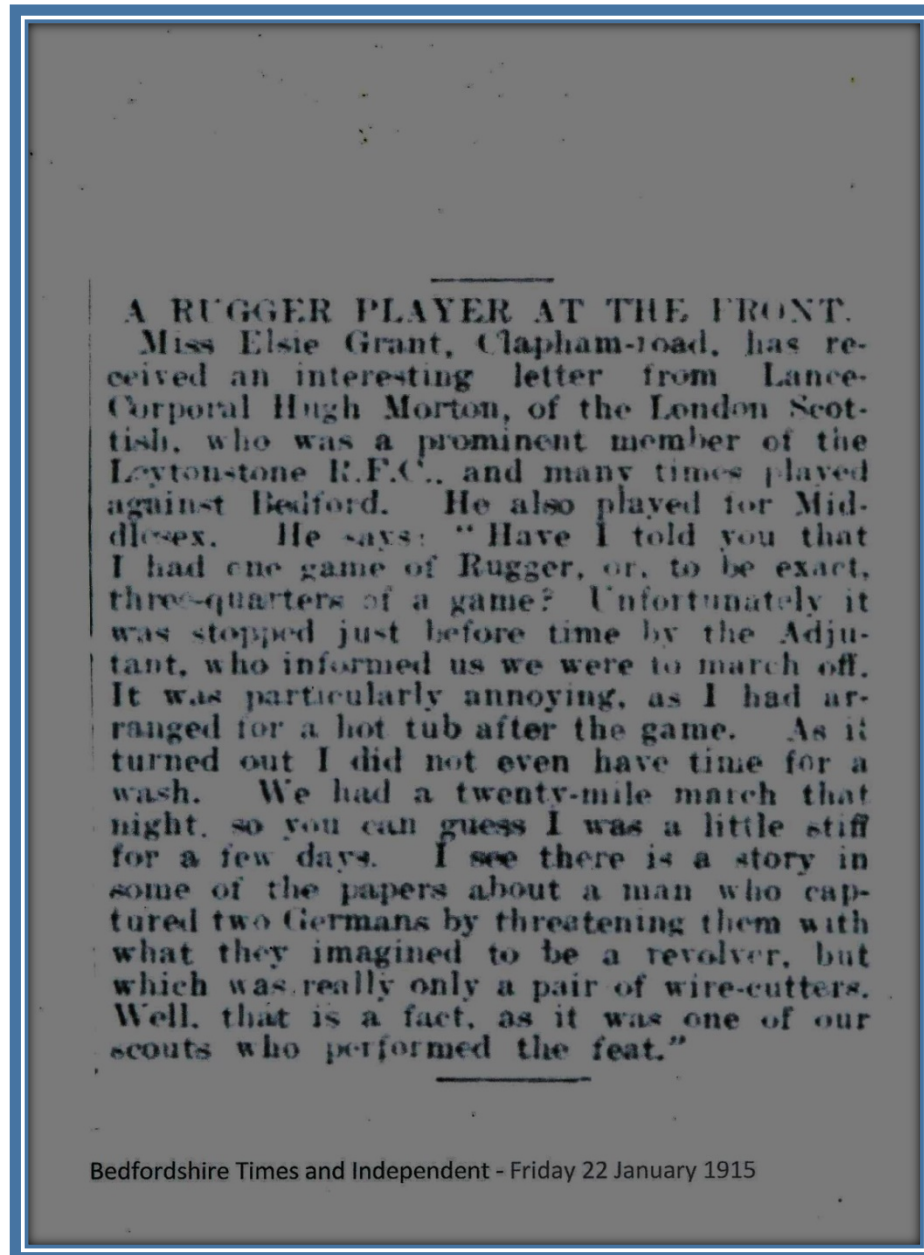
Jessie Morton moved to Wanstead Essex after her husband died and in 1911 was living at "Bransfield" Eagle Lane Snaresbrook. Living with her were her three youngest children, Alexander Morton aged 31 employed as a draper, Grace Morton aged 23, and Hugh Morton



aged 22 and employed as a surveyor for an Estate Agent. On census day, Jessie aged 63 was staying with her daughter also called Jessie, who had married a farmer called Robert Lorimer in 1897. They lived at Priory Farm Cottage, Hildenborough Tonbridge in Kent.

Hugh Morton worked for Cuthbert Lake, a company based at Stone Buildings Lincoln's Inn from 1908. They were Chartered Surveyors and also managed estates throughout London.

Hugh was a keen and talented rugby player and a member of the Leytonstone Rugby Football Club (now the Wanstead Rugby Football Club.) He was also a county player for Middlesex.



*The letter above was written by Hugh and sent to Miss Elsie Clark who passed it to the Bedfordshire Times for publication. Hugh was killed in action just weeks after the letter appeared in the newspaper*





*A Leytonstone Rugby Football Club team photograph c1913. (Hugh is kneeling far left middle row) Photo courtesy of Wanstead Rugby Football Club*

On the outbreak of war it was a natural choice, given Hugh's Scottish heritage, for him to enlist with the 1<sup>st</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> (County of London) Battalion, London Scottish. On 14<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the battalion was stationed at Westminster as part of the 4<sup>th</sup> London Brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Division and it then moved to Abbots Langley in Hertfordshire.



*Soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> (County of London) Battalion London Scottish. They went to France in September 1914.*



In September 1914, the Battalion was mobilised for war and embarked for France. Corporal 2251 Hugh Morton and his Battalion landed at Le Havre on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1914 and transferred to G.H.Q. Troops. On 31.10.1914 they transferred to the Cavalry Corps and engaged at Messines and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battle of Ypres. The London Scottish was the first Territorial infantry battalion to go into action in the Great War at Messines.

### **The London Scottish In The Great War**



For two centuries the officers and men of the London Scottish have faithfully served their country and never more so than during the terrible years of the Great War. Initially with the 1st Guards Brigade and later with the 56th (London) Division, the 1st Battalion served in France and Flanders throughout the War. They were the first Territorial soldiers to be committed to battle when, at Messines in 1914, they suffered one-third casualties and were among the last to disengage. So dedicated was the London Scottish to the prosecution of its cause that, by November 1918, the 1st Battalion included only three survivors of the original Battle of Messines. The 2nd Battalion saw action in campaigns as diverse as France and Flanders, Ireland, the Balkans and Palestine where it won two Victoria Crosses.



On the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1914 they transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and engaged in various actions on the Western Front including The Battle of Mons, the Battle of the Marne, and the Battle of Aisne.



*A Postcard from the Western Front (Author's collection Margaretha Pollitt Brown)*

At the beginning of 1915, the London Scottish was strengthening the front line on the slope east of the village of Cuinchy. The German advance was held up with the Battalion's machine guns inflicting high casualties from their position on the roof of a house at the eastern outskirts of the village. They were relieved on the 28<sup>th</sup> January and moved to billets at Hurionville where they remained isolated throughout February because the Battalion was affected by a serious epidemic of meningitis.

The Battalion moved to Richebourg-St -Vaast at the beginning of March 1915 and from there began tours of duty in forward trenches about Rue de L'Épinette. In early April 1915, the London Scottish was part of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division that took over what had been the French sector in the northern part of the Ypres salient.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> April there were three deaths in the Battalion. It was during this time that Corporal Hugh Morton was gravely injured. He died of his wounds on the 6th April 1915, aged 26, probably at the No 1 Casualty Clearing Station at Chocques, just north of Bethune. This Casualty Clearing Station had been set up in January 1915 and operated until April 1918.



Throughout April 1915 it had been a quiet time for the Battalion, so Hugh was probably struck and wounded by sniper or shell fire.

Hugh was buried in Grave 1 A 64 at the Chocques Military Cemetery in France. He earned the War and Victory medals with the 1914 Star medal and bar.



*The Military Cemetery at Choques*

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
MORTON	14/Land R	Pte	2251
Hugh	—	ap/cpl	—
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	TP/14/101 B	16	D of W. 6. 4. 15.
BRITISH	do	do	
14 STAR	TP/5	55	
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein		15. 9. 14	

K. 1380.

*Hugh Morton's Medal Record Card.*



Hugh is commemorated on the Great War Memorial inside Wanstead United Reformed Church, Nightingale Lane London E11 2HD; on the War Memorial in Wanstead High Street; on the War Memorial at Coopers' Company and Coborn School Upminster; on the Wanstead R.F.C. War Memorial and on the London Scottish Memorial for those who fell in the Great War, which is situated inside the Battalion Headquarters in Horseferry Road London. SW1.

Hugh's mother Jessie Morton died in Snaresbrook on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1921 aged 73. She left £325 to her son Alexander Morton, draper and her daughter Grace Morton, spinster.



*Photo courtesy of Wanstead Rugby Football Club*



In Memory of

Corporal

**Hugh Morton**

2251, 1st/14th Bn., London Regiment (London Scottish) who died on 06 April 1915 Age 26

Son of Hugh and Jessie Morton.

Remembered with Honour  
**Chocques Military Cemetery**



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



## Morton Family Drapers

Scots Credit Drapers, like Hugh Morton senior, were often the younger sons of farmers. Many came from the Scottish borders such as Ayrshire and Dumfries-shire, the latter was a region famous for its tweed. If their fathers were wealthy enough, they could set up and finance their younger sons in businesses in towns and cities throughout England. Often though, the younger sons had to make their own way in the world because only the eldest son would inherit his father's property. Many a young 'Scotch Draper', as they were known, started selling goods door-to-door with customer payments made in instalments. They were also known as travelling drapers, credit drapers and tally men. They moved around the country in pursuit of sales, particularly targeting women, usually with cheap but fashionable clothing, fabric and accessories. When these young salesmen had made enough money, they could establish their businesses in shop premises and then employ other family members to work out of the shop as Travelling Drapers.

It is thought that the Scotch Drapers had a distinct advantage over other sales men in that they had excellent contacts with northern wool and linen suppliers. In the 1881 census, there are small groups of Scottish Drapers living in almost every English town. The extended Morton family were very well established drapers in the East End of London. By sheer hard work, many Scotch Drapers were able to return to their native Scotland and purchase their own farm or small-holding near family members and the place of their birth.

Credit Drapers generally targeted and sold goods to the poor working-class, rather than a wealthier clientele. However, it was possible to make a very good living, as usually, the majority of customers became regular clients. Their customers were able to pay regular amounts off their account while continuing to purchase more goods. Records show that there were a large number of Credit Drapers operating in London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. A popular trade publication was created for them in 1882 called the 'Credit Drapers' Gazette and Trade Informant.' There was also a London Credit Drapers' Association who supported their members. Debt recovery was a common and ongoing problem for Credit Drapers in the Victorian era. Debt laden customers were apt to move home quickly, known as the infamous 'midnight flit', to avoid making payments to their (often many) creditors. The Association and the Gazette staunchly defended the profession against such accusations by debtors (when they were taken to court) that goods were being sold to women without the prior approval of their husbands. Some judges felt that this amounted to sharp working practice and described it as 'despicable'. There was also a class and gender issue here as it was quite acceptable for ladies of the upper classes to obtain goods on credit but not for the working classes. Women of the lower social orders were unfairly deemed by the judiciary of being quite incapable of managing money.



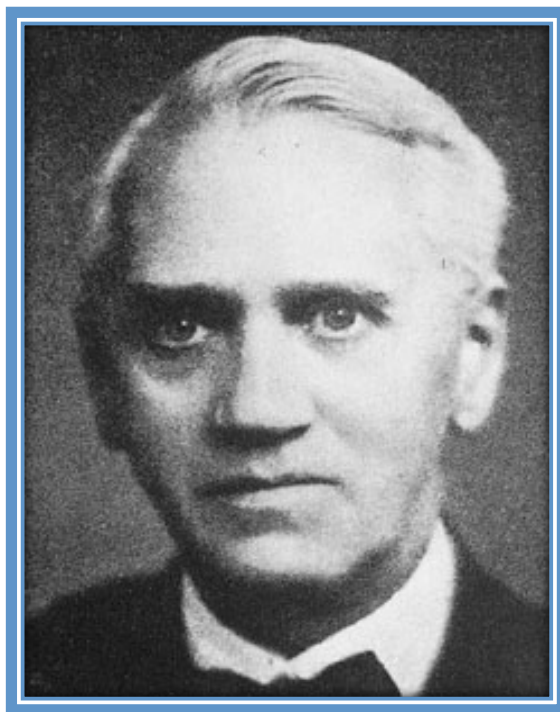
When Hugh Morton senior died in 1906, his drapers' shop at 187, Bow Road remained in the ownership of the Morton family. The 1921 Street Directory lists the shop at no 187 as, 'Morton, H and Son Travelling Drapers.'

Hugh Morton's (senior) younger brother George (1856-1911), born on the farm in Galston Ayrshire was also a London draper. In 1881, he was based at 558, Commercial Road and he specialised as a linen and woollen draper.

George Morton's daughter, (like Hugh's daughter also baptized) Agnes Jane Morton (1881-1972) married another draper called John Leiper in 1903. Their Credit Drapers' business was based at 271, Burdett Road in Limehouse and later "John Leiper and Sons" Travelling Drapers was based at 120, Bow Road where it remained until their youngest child, also called John, but always known as Jack, retired in the 1980's.

Hugh Morton's (senior) nephew, the son of his sister Grace Stirling Morton, (born in 1848) was Sir Alexander Fleming (1881-1955) the Scottish bacteriologist and the discoverer of penicillin in 1928. Grace Morton was Hugh Fleming's second wife. Hugh Fleming (1816-1888) owned Lochfield Farm in Darvel Ayrshire and the neighbouring farm in nearby Galston was owned by the Morton Family.

*Below Hugh Morton's cousin Sir Alexander Fleming*



Alexander Fleming moved to London to live with his brother Thomas in 1895 when he was 14 years old. Alexander used to visit the Morton family and he knew and played with young Hugh and the other children. Alexander served as a Private in Hugh's regiment, the London Scottish from 1900 but he later transferred and served with the Royal Medical Corps for the duration of World War 1.



Scotch Drapers were still operating in England at the time of World War Two. However, during the war, many people were evacuated from London and the larger cities because of the Blitz. This resulted in the Credit Drapers being unable to collect the instalments owing to them. Many drapers had to sell up as their customers had moved away and their debts remained unpaid. However, there were still a reasonable amount of Credit Drapers still trading into the 1960's and a few like the Leiper family who continued to trade until the 1980's.

*(With grateful thanks to Mrs Jill Leiper and the Redbridge members of the Leiper Family for their help and support in researching the Morton family and also the 'Scotch Credit Drapers'.)*



*Family members of "Our 15" standing below the Church War Memorial, with researcher Margaretha Pollitt Brown on Sunday 10th August 2014. Jill Leiper and her son Rob, relatives of Hugh Morton, are on the right.*

Every effort has been made to contact all copyright holders of the material in the profiles of these young men. We will be glad to make good any errors or omissions brought to our attention.

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**Margaretha Pollitt Brown for Wanstead United Reformed Church**

