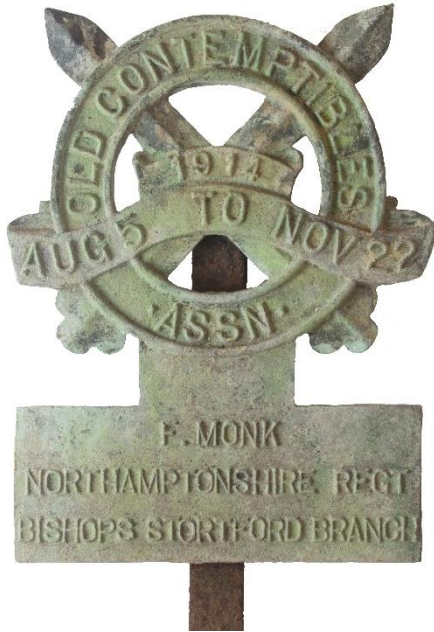


An Old Contemptibles Grave Marker

By Chris Connell



We celebrate the centenary of the First World War's end on 11 November 1918. When the war started, in August 1914, the first British soldiers to be sent to France and Belgium were members of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). These soldiers started to relish the name "Old Contemptibles", in response to a disparaging remark made by the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II.

At the Museum, you can see the restored banner of the Bishop's Stortford Old Contemptibles Association (BSOCA), which used to hang in St Michaels Church.

We also have another object associated with the BSOCA – an "Old Contemptibles" grave marker in the name of F. Monk, Northamptonshire Regiment and the Bishops Stortford Branch. It is in the shape of the 1914, or Mons, Star – a medal awarded to every soldier who had been in France or Belgium with the BEF up to 22nd November 1914.

So, who was F. Monk? By searching through military and civilian records, we believe we have been able to identify him. His full name was Frederick George Monk, born in 1888, in Hertford. By 1901 he was living in Standon. He enlisted in the 2nd Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment, in 1907.

At the outbreak of war, in 1914, his battalion was in Egypt, but was soon brought back to the UK. It was sent to France in early November and quickly saw action in the trenches, near Neuve Chapelle. In March 1915, Monk received a gunshot wound to his back.

By 1918, Monk had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant. He was injured again, this time more seriously, with a gunshot wound to the left arm and a fractured thigh. His leg was at some later stage amputated.

Monk was awarded the 1914 Star, and also the Clasp and Roses, as well as the British War and Victory Medals.

In 1920, he married Violet Dickinson, from Edmonton, North London, at Ware Register Office. On the marriage certificate he is described as an "Army Pensioner". They lived in Standon and had four children, Elizabeth, Dorothy, Frederick and George. In 1939, he is described as a "Disabled war pensioner" and "barman at a club".

Monk died in 1950 and was buried at the local church, St Mary's, the inscription on the headstone describing him as "an old contemptible".

We would be delighted to hear from anyone who has memories of Frederick Monk.

The museum's grave marker is currently on display at the Bishop's Stortford Museum in the Rhodes Arts Complex.

The Bishop's Stortford Museum is your first choice for discovering the history of the town. With a mix of local history displays, holiday activities and themed walks and talks, we have something to offer the whole family. Admission to the museum is free and is open Monday –Friday 10am to 5pm and from 10am – 4pm on Saturday's.

Researched and written by Chris Connell.

Chris Connell has been a volunteer at the museum for seven years, working mainly on adding new acquisitions to the records systems, as well as doing research for the occasional article. He has an interest in local history, particularly that associated with Hatfield Forest.