

PERSONS AND PLACES

Mr. E.B. Francis

The late Mr. E.B. Francis , of Rayleigh, will be remembered as an indefatigable local archaeologist as well as a public benefactor. His researches regarding Rayleigh Mount were ultimately rewarded by the establishment of the accuracy of the previously expressed tradition that a castle had existed at Rayleigh.

Mr. Francis had settled in Rayleigh after a career in the Indian Civil Service, and it was in 1909 that he obtained possession of the Mount. His investigations showed conclusively that a castle existed there at a very early date, being probably built by Suen, when he established his headquarters at Rayleigh after the Norman Conquest. Yet the stronghold did not last long, for in the Thirteenth Century it was referred to as grazing ground, and only the foundations were left in 1394. Much of its material was probably used to build Hadleigh Castle and as late as the Fourteenth Century, the ruins were used to furnish stone to repair Rayleigh Church.

In the course of his excavations, Mr. Francis unearthed numerous interesting articles, including Roman tiles, coins of King Stephen, early metal articles and pieces of medieval pottery. Many of these relics are now to be seen in the Southend Borough Museum at Prittlewell Priory. In 1923 Mr. Francis conveyed the Mount to the National Trust, and it will thus be preserved to the public for ever.

It was in 1913 that he also carried out investigations at Plumberow Mount , on behalf of the Morant Club, but these proved inconclusive, through it was found that, though not of a sepulchral character, it was without doubt of the Romano-British period. Mr. Francis had been a member of the Essex Archaeological Society for many years. He was also greatly interested in horticulture and, besides being a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, he was for some years President of the Rayleigh Horticultural Society. He was an active supporter of local charities and contributed generously to the restoration of the parish church. His benevolence will cause him to be greatly missed in the Rayleigh area.