

The Essex Chronicle 26th May 1939

LOSS TO RAYLEIGH

DEATH OF MR. E. B. FRANCIS

The death occurred on Saturday of Mr. Edward Belcham Francis, of "Castlebank," Crown Hill, Rayleigh, 88 years. Mr Francis was born at Hawkwell, the son of the late Mr. C. Wordley Francis and Mrs. Francis.

He qualified for a Government post, and for 25 years was in the India Civil Service, from which he retired in 1896. Returning home, Mr. Francis, who was a bachelor and lived most of his latter years with his sister, Miss Francis, likewise a much-revered local resident, followed a quiet life of a country gentleman.

He displayed an interest in most affairs, though taking no actual part in them. His generosity was almost severe in its unobtrusiveness. Little of a deserving nature lacked his assistance and not only local institutions but many others will remember him as a benefactor. He was always interested in Dr Barnardo's Homes, and he used to double the amount of the local flag day collection.

He was a manager of the old Board School, now the Parish Room; a former president of Rayleigh Horticultural Society and during the war he engaged in recruiting and sat on a local Tribunal. In politics he was a staunch Conservative.

Mr. Francis will also be remembered for the single service he rendered to Rayleigh in connection with the preservation of the Mount. It is due to him this historical spot, the site of a Norman castle, remains to be enjoyed by the public in perpetuity. With commendable public spirit, Mr. Francis purchased this site in 1909. He investigated the records and history of the castle and discovered the extensive foundations, coming across arrow-heads, knives and whetstones, spurs, quaint locks and keys, bronze armaments and seven silver pennies, very thin and much tarnished coin from King Stephen's reign between 1135 and 1154. The articles found were placed in the Priory Park Museum. Mr. Francis then placed his seal upon the work by handing over the property to the National Trust in 1923.

Mr. Francis was a member of the Parish Church and a generous subscriber to its funds. In connection with the thorough restoration in 1912-13, the repair of the fine tower was carried out and Mr. Francis and his mother defrayed the expense. Mr. Francis also subscribed to the renovation of the windows in more recent years.

Horticulture was the deceased's keenest delight. He had a pleasant old-world garden. Apart from his membership of the Essex Archaeological Society he was also a member of the Royal Horticultural Society. Mr. Francis neither sought nor received the applause- his main object in life being to do good by stealth.

The funeral took place quietly and privately at the City of London Cemetery, Ilford, followed by cremation. The mourners were Henry Francis (brother) and the Misses F and A.K. Francis (sisters), and the Nurse, Betty Williams.

For reference, Fanny Ann Francis and Agnes Kate Francis.