

THE VILLAGE OF RALEIGH

Martin Gilbert

At the meeting in Birmingham (see p. 16) Lester Smith showed us his set of slides *Christmas Customs* by Edmund Wilkie. Among these was one called 'The Village of Raleigh' with a text, written by the headmaster of the school that commissioned the slides. It read as follows:

Strange beliefs the common folk often had. One I may mention is the story that bells might be heard to ring upon each Christmas Eve in a valley close to the village of Raleigh in Leicestershire [now believed to have been in Nottinghamshire]. This is said to have been caused by an earthquake which swallowed up a whole village, including the church, many hundreds of years ago. Formerly it was the custom of the people to assemble in the valley on Christmas morning to listen to the bells which, it was asserted most positively, might be heard by anyone.

The view was strangely familiar. I have a very similar image in a large slide from the Polytechnic Institution, but did not know which set it came from. The differences between the two slides are subtle – look at the sky and figures in the valley, for example – and their formats are different.

Now I have been able to identify my set as *Christmas and its Customs*, painted by W.R. Hill in 1867. It would appear that the slide was last projected publicly by Edmund Wilkie for the Lantern Society meeting at Hanover Square, London, on 26 November 1894. There were 57 slides shown that evening – Wilkie's notes for slide 54 read:

VIEW 54 THE VILLAGE OF RALEIGH: Near the village of Raleigh in Leicestershire a curious custom prevailed. There is a legend that has been handed down for centuries. In the spot represented by this picture once stood a church and as the bells were ringing merrily one Christmas



The Village of Raleigh. Martin Gilbert's slide (Hill) above, Lester Smith's slide (Wilkie) right



morning a great land-slip took place, and buried the church and all that were in it. Although this is now regarded as a purely imaginary circumstance, many folks come here on Christmas morning and putting their ears to the ground, fancy they can still hear the bells ringing a merry peal.