

CABAN

JANUARY, 1954



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THE MAGAZINE OF THE OAKELEY AND VOTTY SLATE QUARRIES

CABAN

THE OAKELEY SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,
THE VOTTY AND BOWYDD SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,
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"CABAN" is the name of the type of mess-room in which the men of Oakeley and Votty meet for their meal-break . . . and which is also the centre of social life and passing of information throughout the quarries, hence the title of this magazine.

- *Front Cover: Father and son partnership, R. E. Davies and Kenneth Davies in "K.27," New Vein, Votty.*
- *Below: "M" Floor Caban, Oakeley. (See News Exchange).*



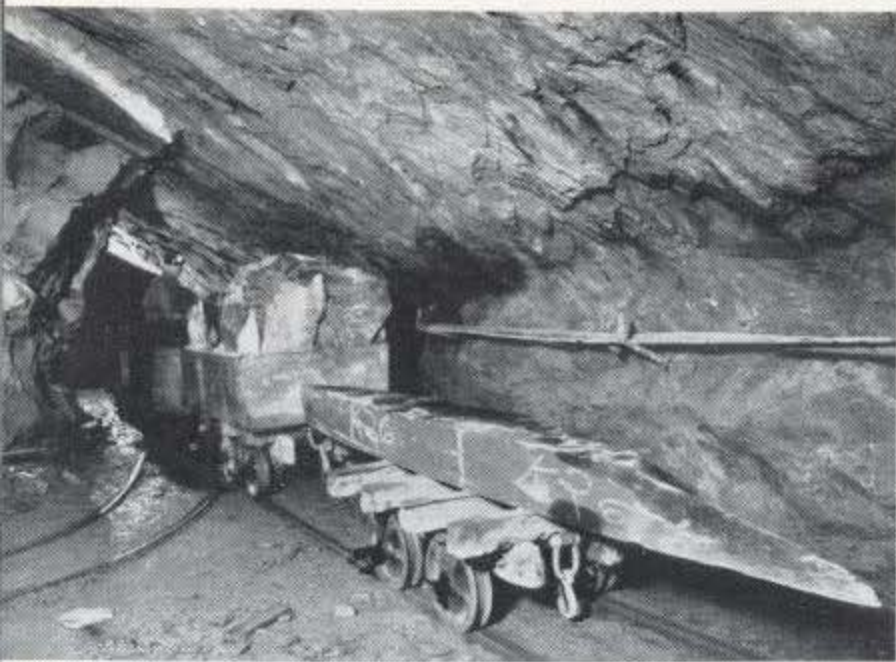
FROM FLOOR TO FLOOR— *The Middle Distances*



Traffic near main incline, Votty

OUR STORY of the journey into the Oakeley and Votty mines now takes us to the “middle distances,” where the surge of work increases in importance and momentum.

In the last issue we surveyed the main haulage levels. At Oakeley this took the reader one stage underground. At Votty, and as the picture at the head of this article shows, we had reached the



Electric loco capable of hauling 20 tons

brink of the main incline serving the network of floors below.

The electric haulage at Votty lowered us quickly to the level of "K" floor where an electric loco serves the full length of chambers in the New Vein.

The loco is capable of drawing loads of 20 tons and is powered by motor, driven by batteries which are re-charged nightly at a power point conveniently located on the

Working through to the "bôn."



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floor. A much smaller load is shown in the picture we took going in on "K." Driver Edward Thomas is seen taking out a block and other material from chamber 26, quite half a mile inside the workings. Elsewhere is illustrated, in close-up, another sturdy and reliable loco—a Ruston and Hornsby diesel—which, catering for Floor "I," one step above "K," is seen with Robert I. Jones at the controls and Storeman J. Evan Roberts standing by, as a trainload of empty trucks negotiates a bend into the New Vein development area.

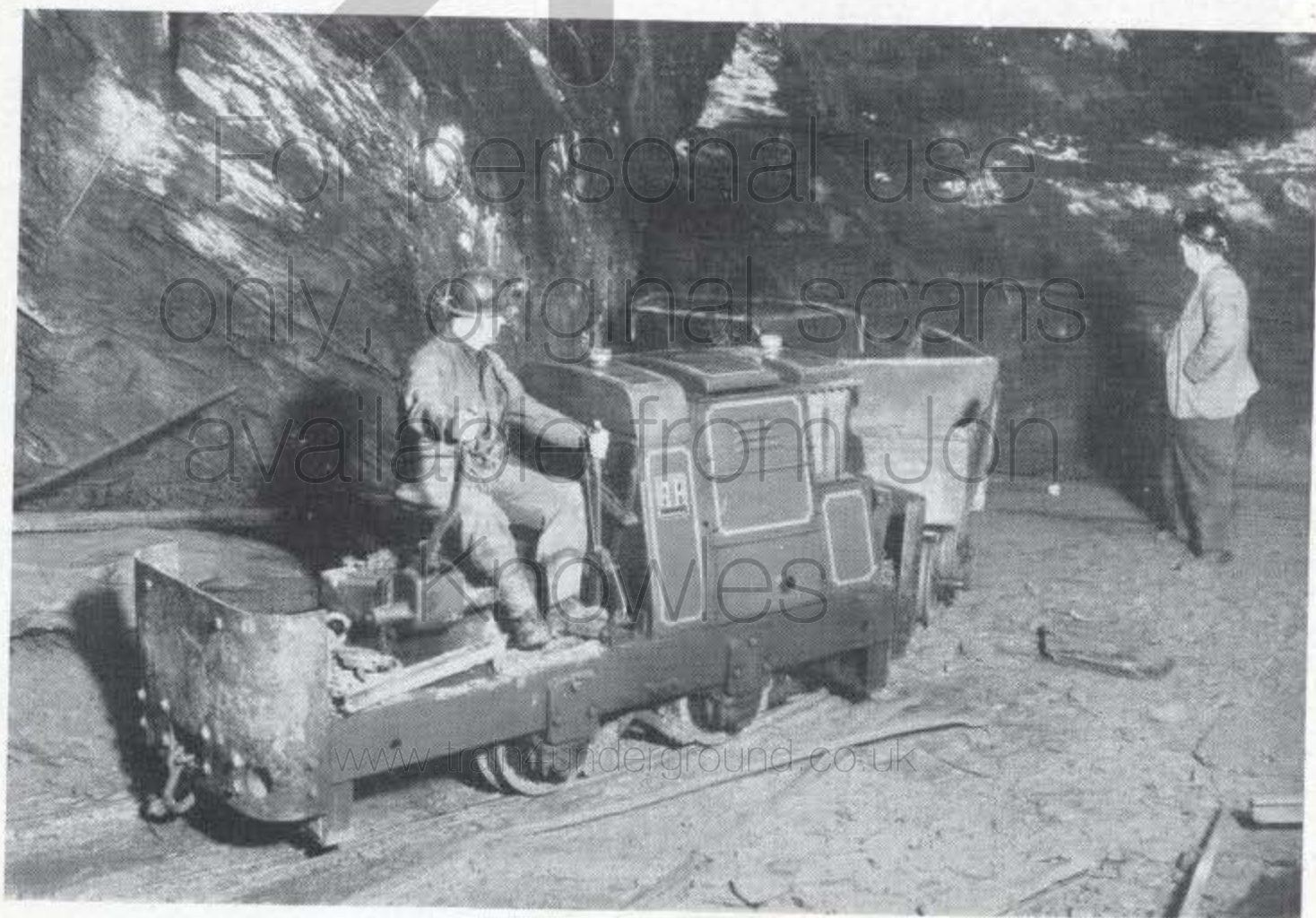
Father and Son partnership

Work on "K" has continued many years with the result that the number of chambers at this level has reached double figures. In one of the higher numbers—"K.27"—

on our route to "L" Floor, we found rockmen R. E. Davies and his son Kenneth at work—the only father and son rockman partnership in the mine.

The adjoining chamber, "K.26" was in an advanced stage of development. Work had progressed to the point where the "bôn," or base of the chamber above was visible. Our picture shows that the immediate objective of the rockmen, Evan Ellis Roberts and Thomas Ellis Jones is to push forward at the angle of the vein and ultimately into the solid slate floor of the chamber above and beyond them.

While older chambers on this and higher floors continue to give useful service, yielding their quota of high quality slate, it is in the part of the mine below and rather



Sturdy Diesel on "I", Votty

ahead of the zone of the "K.20s"—the area of the Old Vein, ranging in the "Thirties" on "L" Floor—that the visitor will receive his best impression of slate *in situ* and in bulk.

Starting a Chamber

The way down to "L" Floor via an inclined and tunnelled staircase is readily accessible. Chambers 34 and 35 are already in full working order. The method of starting a chamber was well presented in "L.36," where Meirion Wyn Morris and Cyril Lewis—products of our apprenticeship scheme—had newly followed the miners into the chamber to begin work on the virgin vein. The clean-cut side, or widening, left for them by the miners, and the inviting vast top layer of slate lying at its angle in the strata from

the top to the bottom of the section opened for work, made an impressive picture. The rockmen, —one leaning against the angle, the other holding the dust extractor—are shown in our illustration drilling along the cleavage for the purpose of disengaging or splitting a carefully calculated top-layer, or slice, from the bed of the giant slab. Having accomplished this, the rockmen later would drive a complementary pillaring hole through from the surface at right angles to the cleft and thus induce a vertical split, which would enable them to win from the solid mass a block of the dimensions and volume desired.

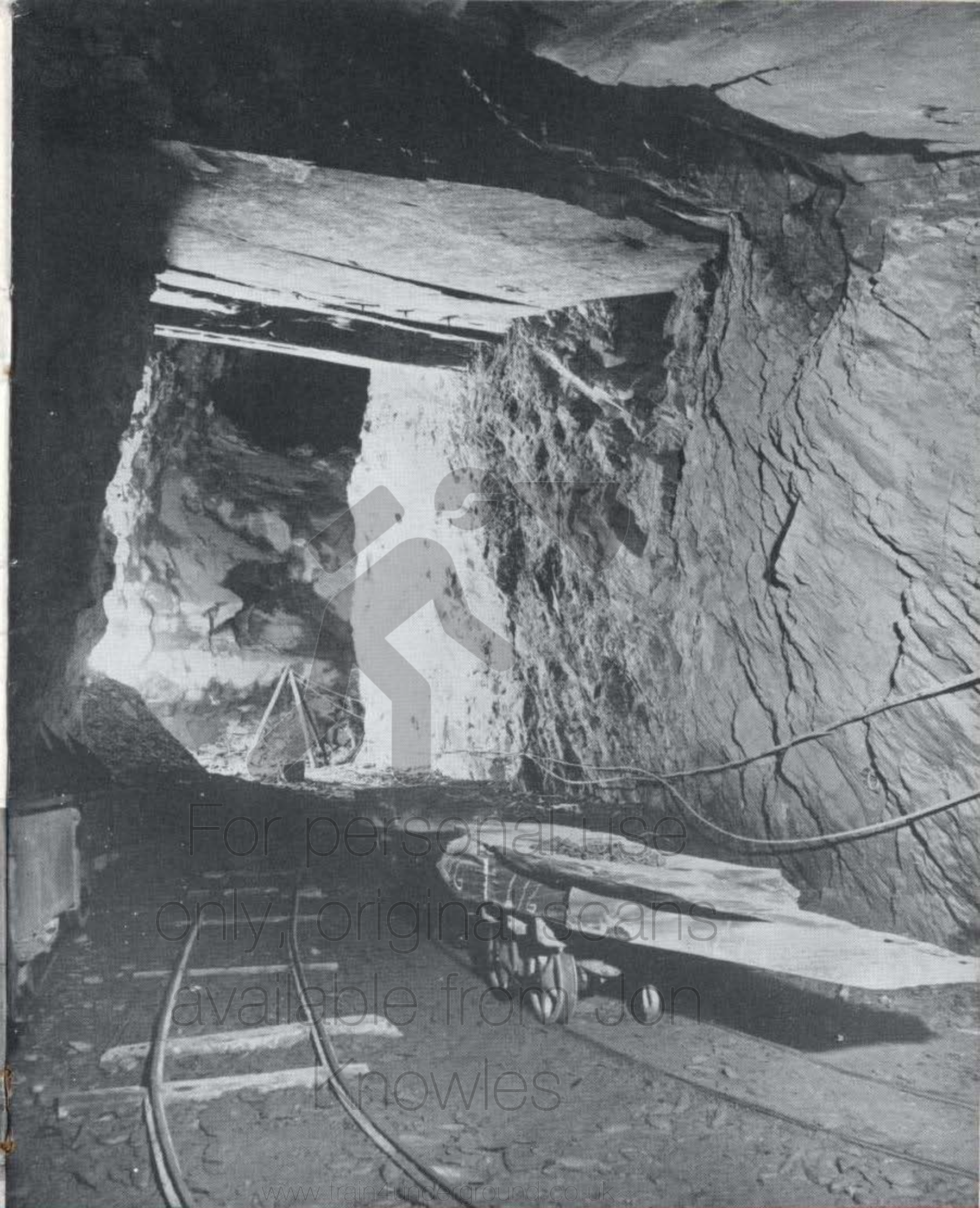
The winning of Old and New Vein continues apace at Votty. Miners are at work opening two further chambers in the line. In-

Starting a chamber. Meirion Morris and Cyril Lewis in L.36, Votty



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... potential fulfilled ! Back view, "L.16," Votty

deed, it is likely that the level will go through into the "Forties."

Production potential

While the sight of so much embedded slate, bared before the rockman's drill, is certainly impressive when seen for the first time, the real picture of the potential of production contained in a newly-opened place—the fully-worked capacity of a typical underground chamber—must be viewed from the other extreme. For this, it is necessary to leap the ten, fifteen or twenty years which elapse before a chamber such as "L.36" is deemed to be approaching the stage of having been fully worked through, with the thick vein of slate, lying between the high supporting walls or pillars,

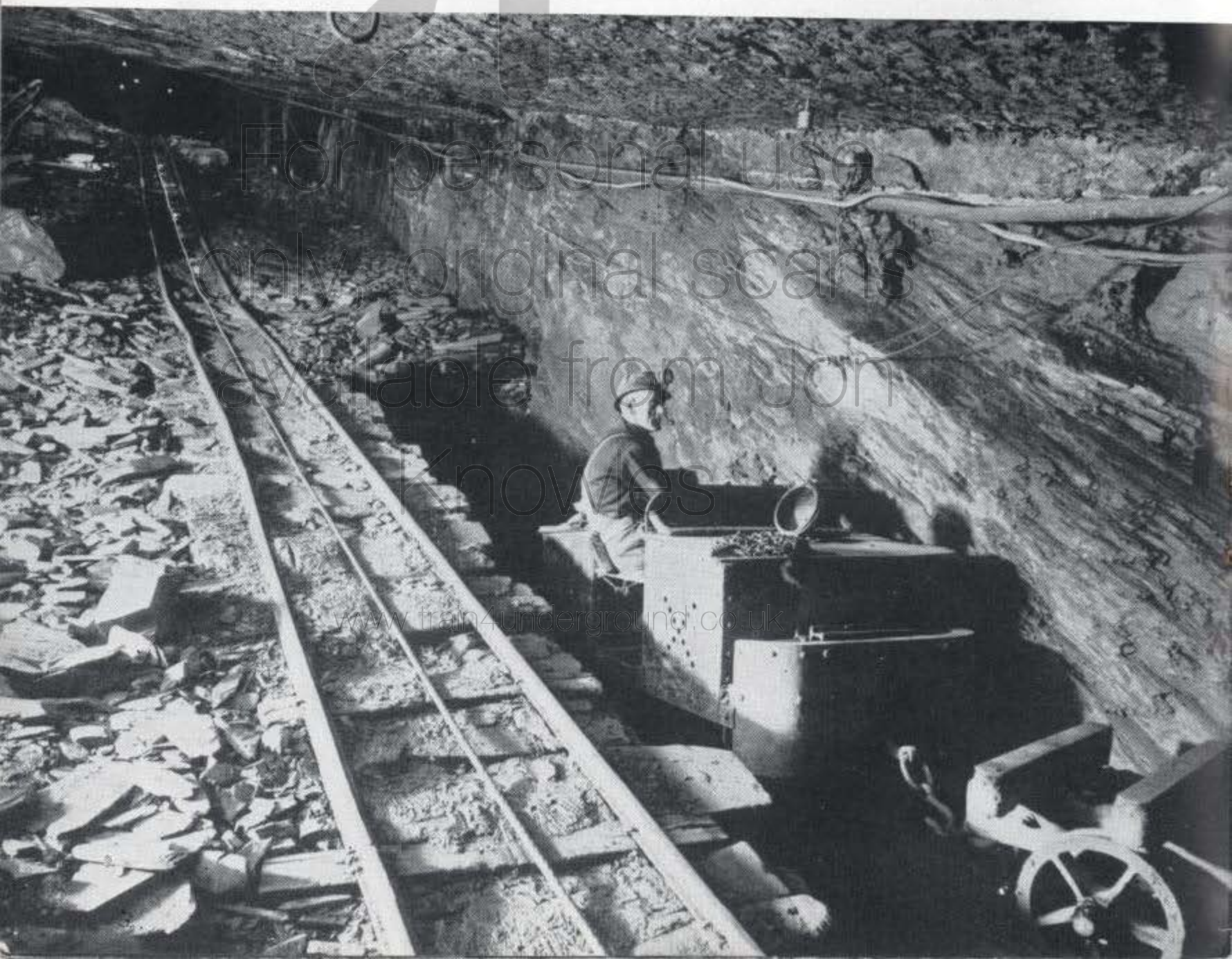
prised out and carried away throughout its whole length, breadth and depth. To see this at a glance one must go back on the years and into the older group of chambers on "L" floor.

A Glance backwards

Our picture of the chosen chamber, viewed from the traffic level at the wide entrance to the great open vault, looks down a distance of 52 yards, all of it worked cleanly from a solid mass of slate such as that on which the young ex-apprentice, Cyril Lewis, is starting his career as a rockman.

Beyond the tripod in the back-ground will be seen what remains of this section of the vein sloping sharply upwards into the gloom where the rockmen, David Anwyl

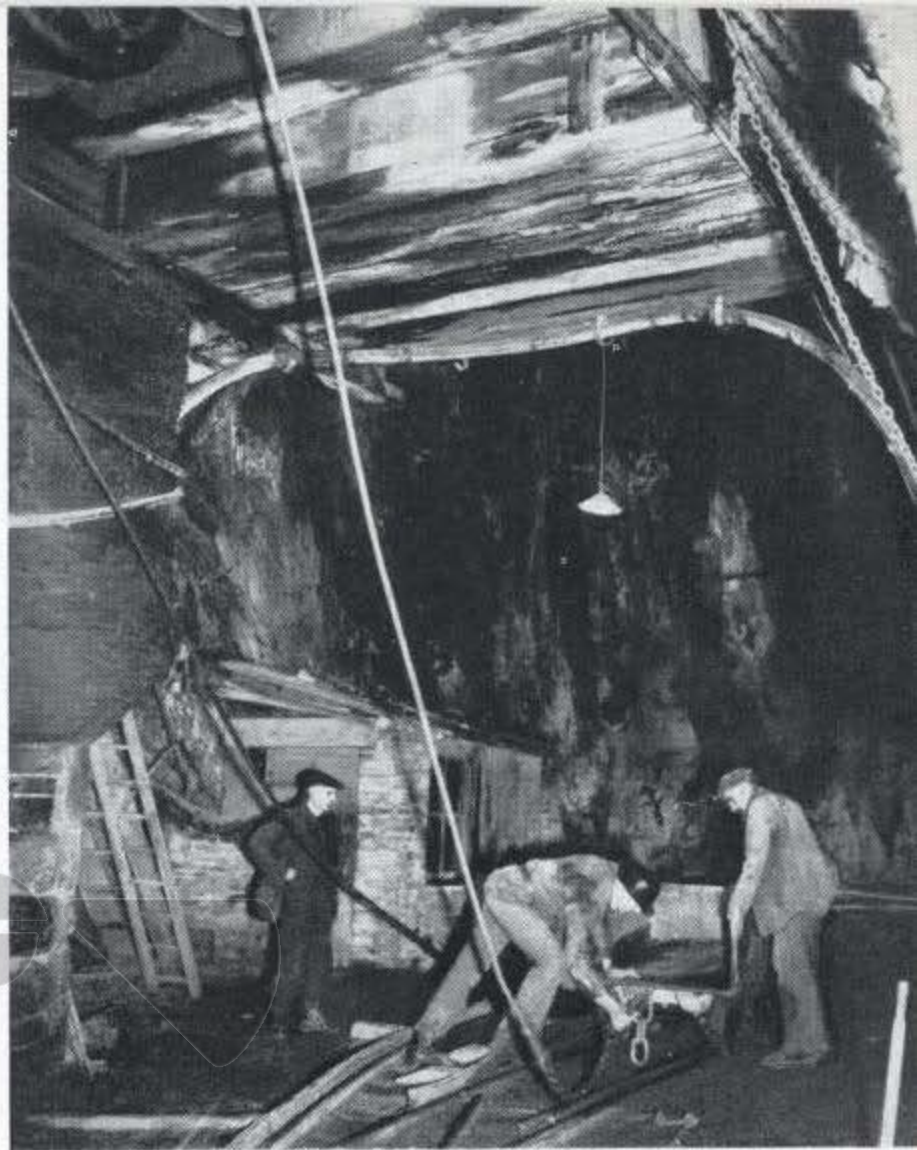
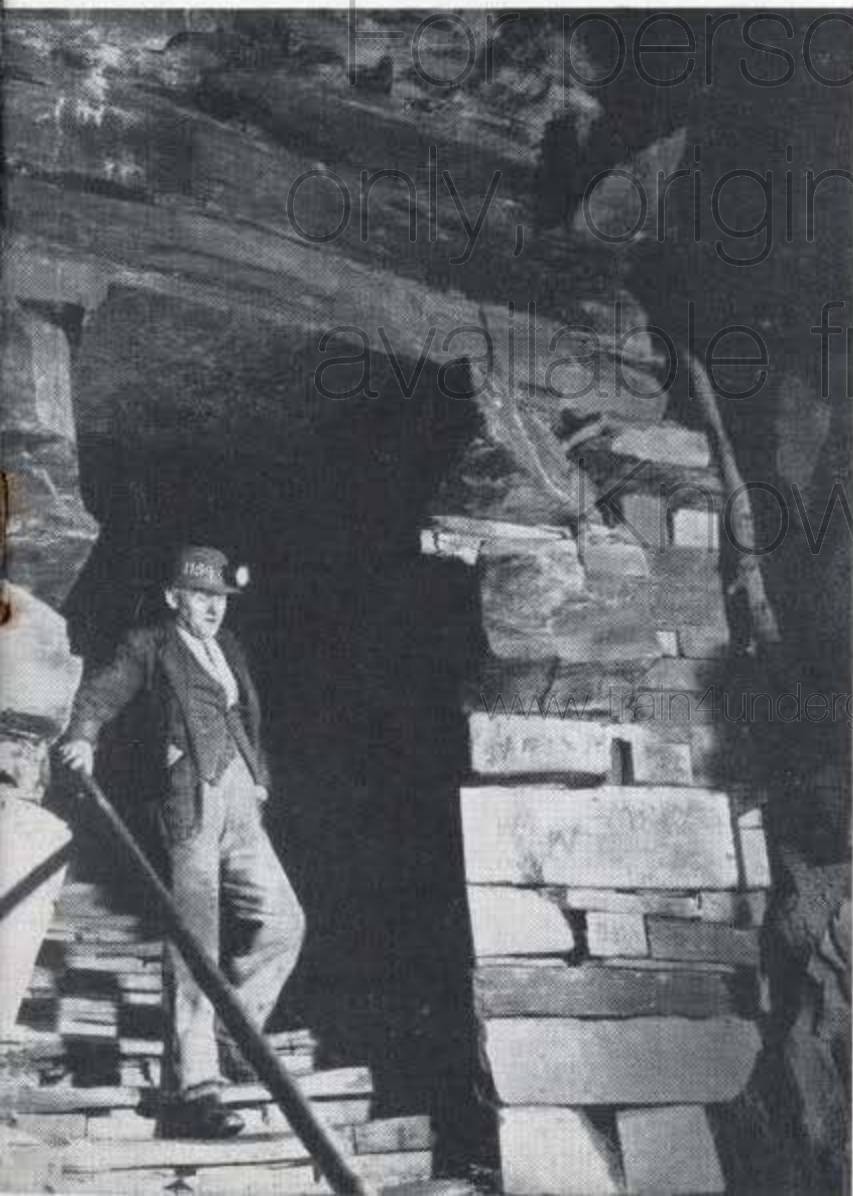
"K" to "M" incline, Votty. W. Llew. Jones bringing in "L" floor loco and train



Williams and Roderick Roberts, have already worked to the floor of the chamber above. Another aspect of the fulfilment of the "potential" in a given chamber is demonstrated in the full page picture on the back cover of the inside of a fully developed working in the Old Vein, in this instance, showing the diminutive figures of the rockmen, E. R. Jones and R. W. Jones, literally on top of their work.

The tiny figures of men, when measured in the mind's eye against the loftiness, length and breadth of the echoing, empty chamber, convey graphically a fair estimate of the stint which confronted the rockmen who, many years ago, first embarked on the opening of this particular chamber. The actual distance between this, the concluding stage of development,

Oakeley staircase



Top of "Old Incline" on "K"

and that we saw started at "L.36" is difficult to calculate, but as one old hand said, it must measure several miles of slated roofs!

Serving the three floors "K" to "M" is an independent incline cut parallel with the main haulage incline, and to which it is linked by a loco-operated traffic route. In charge of the "L" floor loco—converted to a battery locomotive by the Votty engineers—is William Llewelyn Jones.

"Enbyd!"

Crossing a high-level bridge at Oakeley where, sixty feet below the parapet, pin-points of light marked the presence of rockmen at work in "NB.6," the drawn-out sing-song cry of "Enbyd!" ("Danger!") repeated thrice with



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. . . wedge of Old Vein, L.6.

sustained urgency was carried up on the cool draught of the ventilation. Blasting was about to begin on the floor below. The time-honoured warning shout, always cried in the Welsh language, was followed in due time by the explosion of a gunpowder charge and the rumble of falling rock. All in the vicinity must heed the warning and take suitable precautions against the danger of flying fragments. The banshee cries of "Enbyd!" and the bump of the explosions followed us underfoot along the level of the floor.

The firing of controlled charges is within the competence of all experienced rockmen. Normally the rock so dislodged will have followed the pattern prescribed by the rockman.

He will have gauged the length, breadth and thickness of the slab to be dislodged or brought down

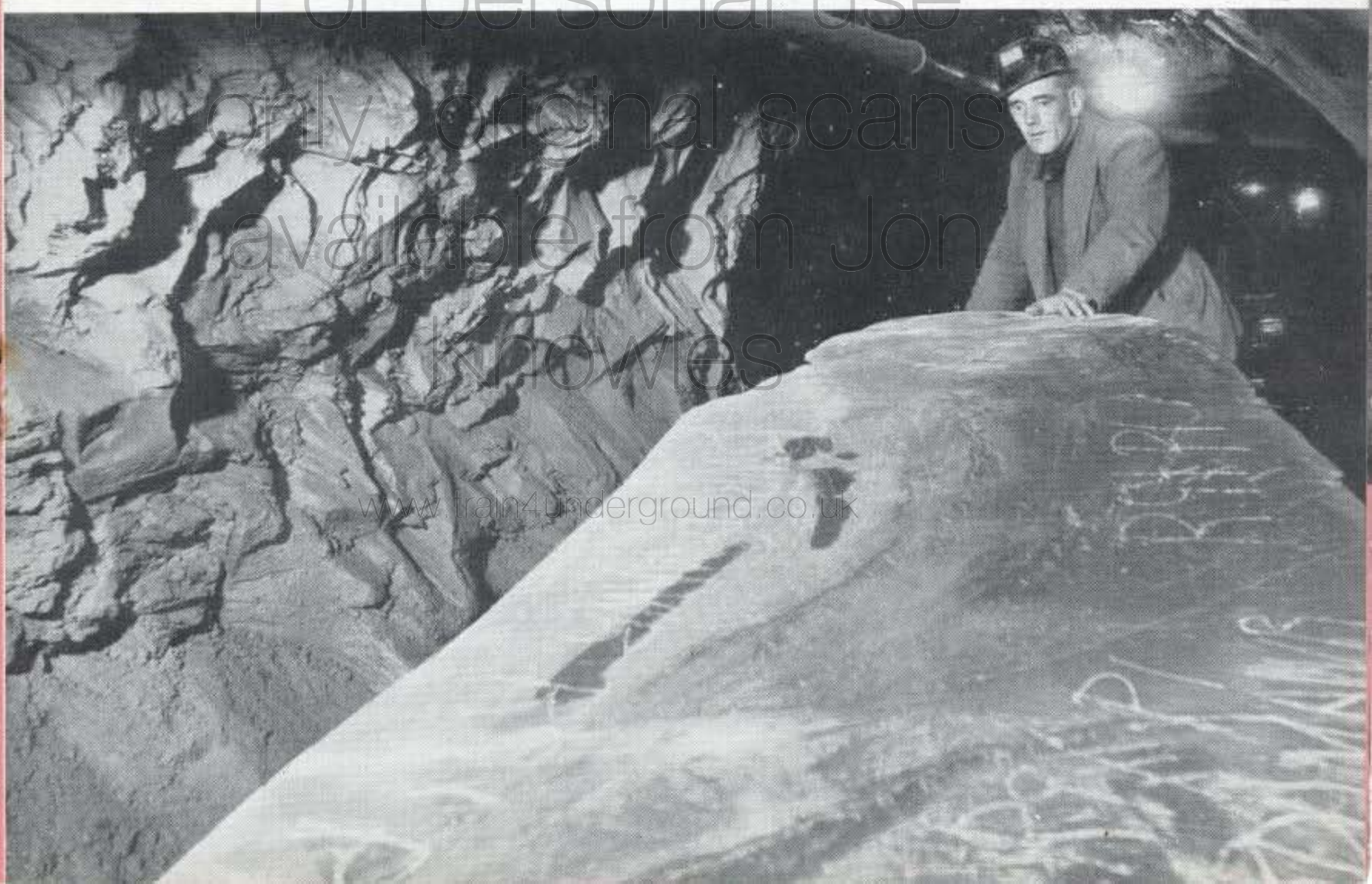


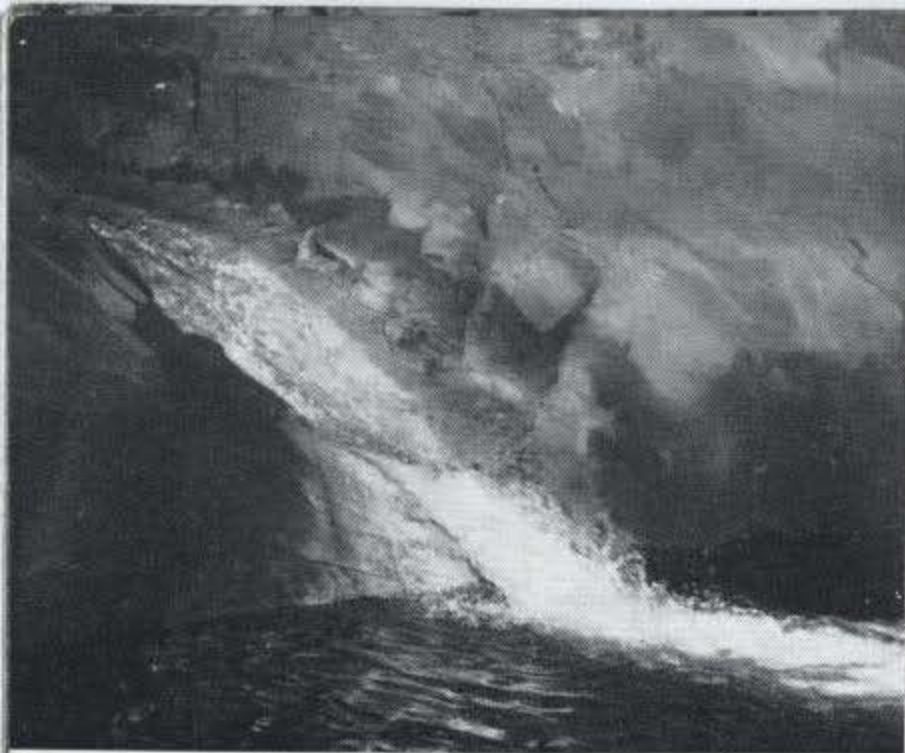
High level view from "M" floor, Oakeley

by the charge. When the dust and smoke of the explosion has settled the rockmen return to work, crow-bars in hand, knowing what to expect.

An unusual or abnormal result of a particular charge producing a situation carrying with it the threat of danger, also falls within the

Block from "P.1" fills the picture





Typical loom at Oakeley

compass of the rockmen's "intuition," or as they would prefer to say, their "intelligent anticipation." Occasionally, to gain an objective, snags in the rock have to be eliminated. Such situations, if they reveal a latent danger, are resolved in consultation with the under-managers and, if necessary,

are tackled with the co-operation of security specialists. In the average course of events, however, the rockmen themselves are capable of detecting, avoiding and eliminating snags.

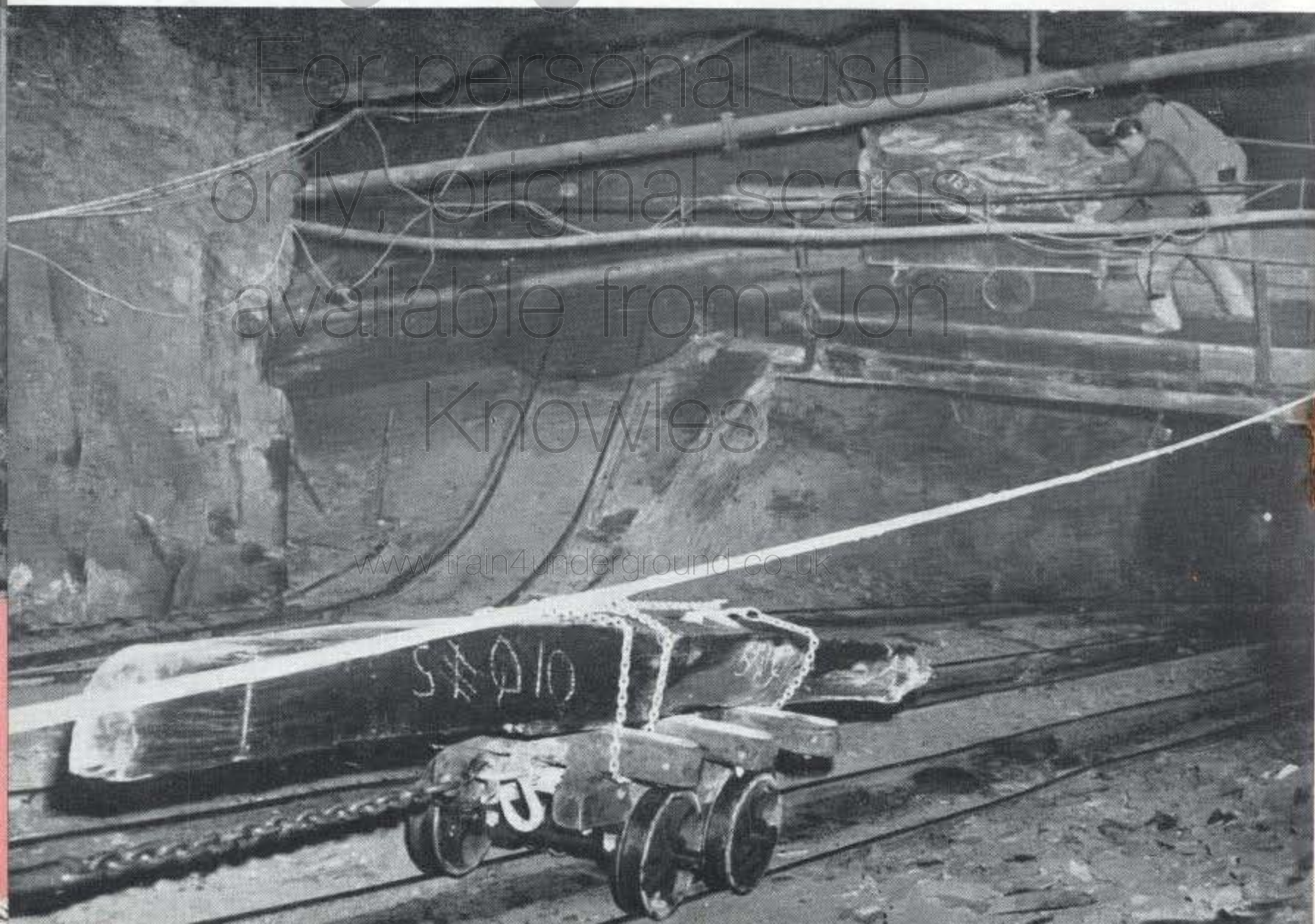
De-watering at Oakeley

The way down from "K" to "L" is along a well-defined staircase route zig-zagging through a filled-up chamber.

Our picture, depicting a block from the nether regions at "P" level passing under a bridge at the "L" Floor loading junction typifies the scene at the respective landings at all floors on the main route down to "P." A further auxiliary short haul links the bottom floor at "R" level with the main incline on "P."

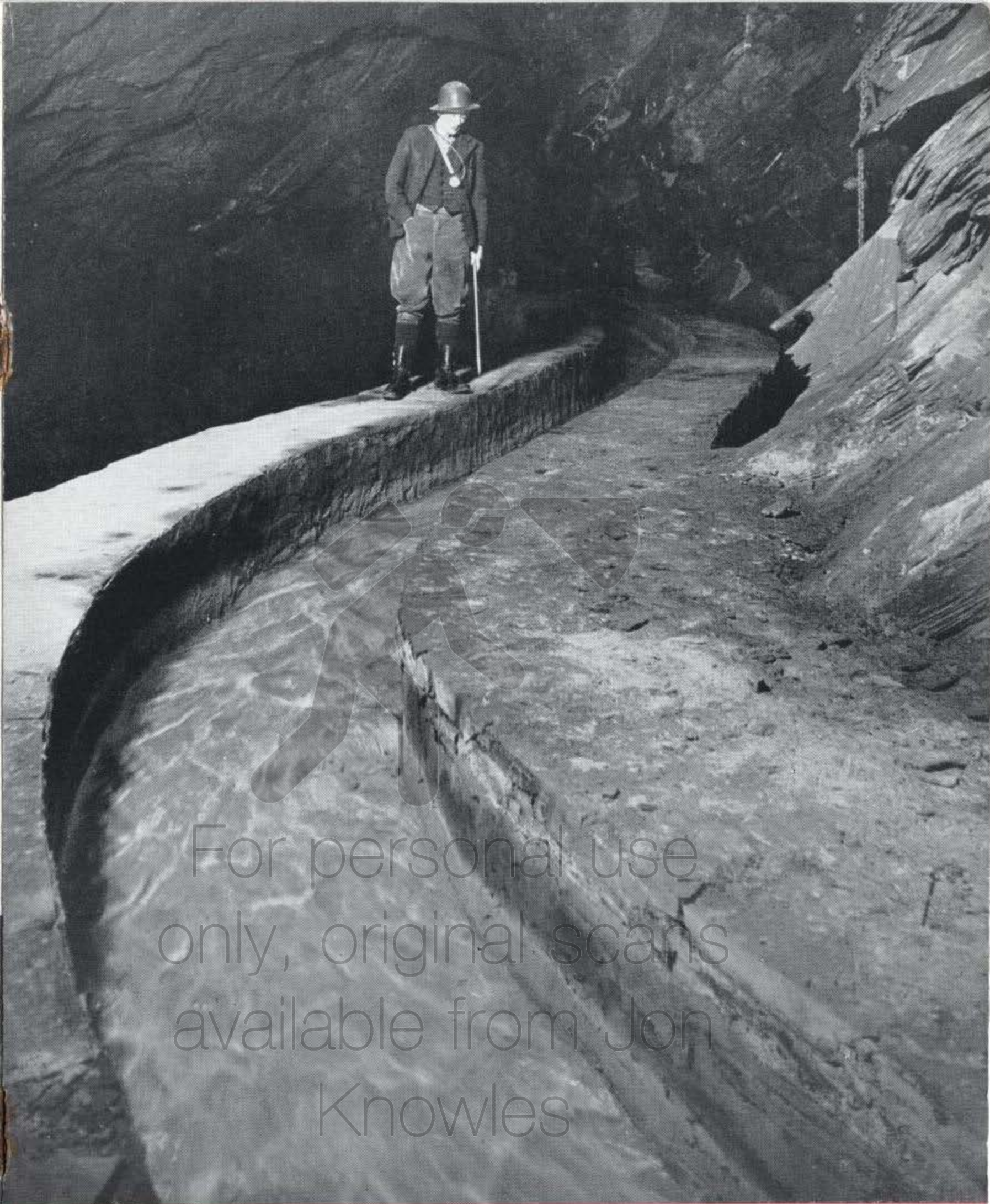
(Continued on page 16)

"L" floor loading at Oakeley



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Undermanager W. Owen Williams inspects leat on "L" floor

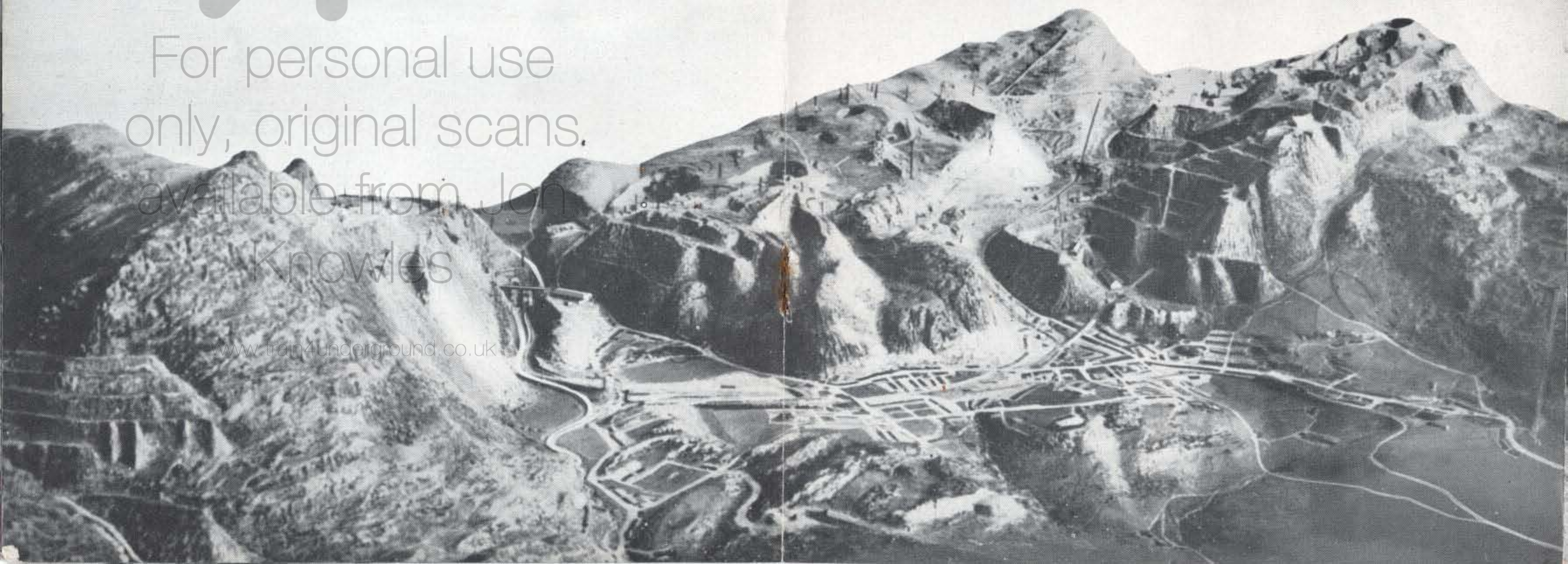
This fine scale model of the physical features of the Blaenau Ffestiniog slate-mining district is the centre-piece of an exhibition of *Caban* photographs of slate-winning at Oakeley and Votty placed on view in the galleries of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

(See page 20)



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GOING DOWN AT OAKELEY

(FLOOR TO FLOOR, continued from page 12)

ON "L" Floor Old Vein slate is still worked and won. On this old-established floor, too, are located the major intermediate pumping stages for de-watering the mine. Situated as we are in a mountainous district, where the annual rainfall averages upwards of 100 inches, it is to be expected that rather more than a modest volume of water will find its way into the mine workings at Oakeley, either by seepage or via more direct routes.

Watch and Ward

The Oakeley quarryman sees little of this water in the mine. A network of leats and looms, strategically deployed, contrive successfully to trap and divert the unwanted element into out-of-the-way places whence the water is pumped out for discharge on the surface. The rhythmic thud of the powerful pumps are a reminder of the need for constant watch and ward.

Our picture of the new Oakeley under-manager, William Owen Williams, inspecting one leat constructed across the top level of a disused chamber situated just off the line of traffic on "L" Floor, offers a fair impression of the quite substantial and permanent provision made for de-watering. The flow of water continues through a tunnel in the 12 yards thick chamber wall, and is low in the channel, denoting a comparatively

dry spell. A rise of one foot in the leats is commonplace following heavy rains.

The dark pool we have pictured is on the other side of the chamber wall. The foaming outlet is from the "L" floor leat.

Tackling the Job

We have touched on the nicety with which large blocks of slate of prescribed sizes are dislodged from the face of the vein by the rockman. In "L.6" we picture the initial operation, showing John Roberts and Maldwyn Davies having taken their foothold on the wall of the chamber preparatory to boring a pillaring hole behind the great inverted wedge-shaped mass of slate which they had decided to take out and win.

Theirs was a long job. In due course they will have extracted the rear section—a block no bigger, no smaller, than that required to simplify the major task of winning the inviting mass of prime Old Vein seen in the foreground of the picture.

In chamber "LB.8" one could see at close range the effect of such skilled and calculated work. There, David Lloyd Jones and John Williams had brought down from near the top of the chamber a block exceeding ten tons in weight.

Dexterity

The subsequent operations, on the floor of the chamber, called for finer demonstrations of their skill

—the splitting of the mass into manageable proportions. The pictures show this operation before and after the splitting, and after at least two tons had been sliced from the top surface.

The rockman is shown, first, driving home his chisel a moment or two before the tell-tale crack appeared and shot through the length and thickness of the bulk. In the second picture, taken immediately after the split, the two rockmen are shown levering the two blocks apart, thus completing the cleavage. Further splitting may be decided upon before despatching the raw material to slate makers in the mills above ground. Dexterity rather than main force is the quality which succeeds in the manhandling of blocks of such dimensions. The dead weight is taken care of by power winches.

“M” Floor, Oakeley

The New Vein is being worked on in the northern section of the

“M” Floor. “MB.10” is awaiting the arrival of the rockmen. At the inspection William Owen Williams points to the route onwards — a dark opening under the north wall of the chamber through which miners will drive a level before opening a companion chamber. The rough-hewn surface of the slate is as the miners had left it after widening a working foothold for the rockmen. The first task of the rockmen in such a situation is to skim the surface, taking off what is known as “Y tew cyntaf,” or the first thickness.

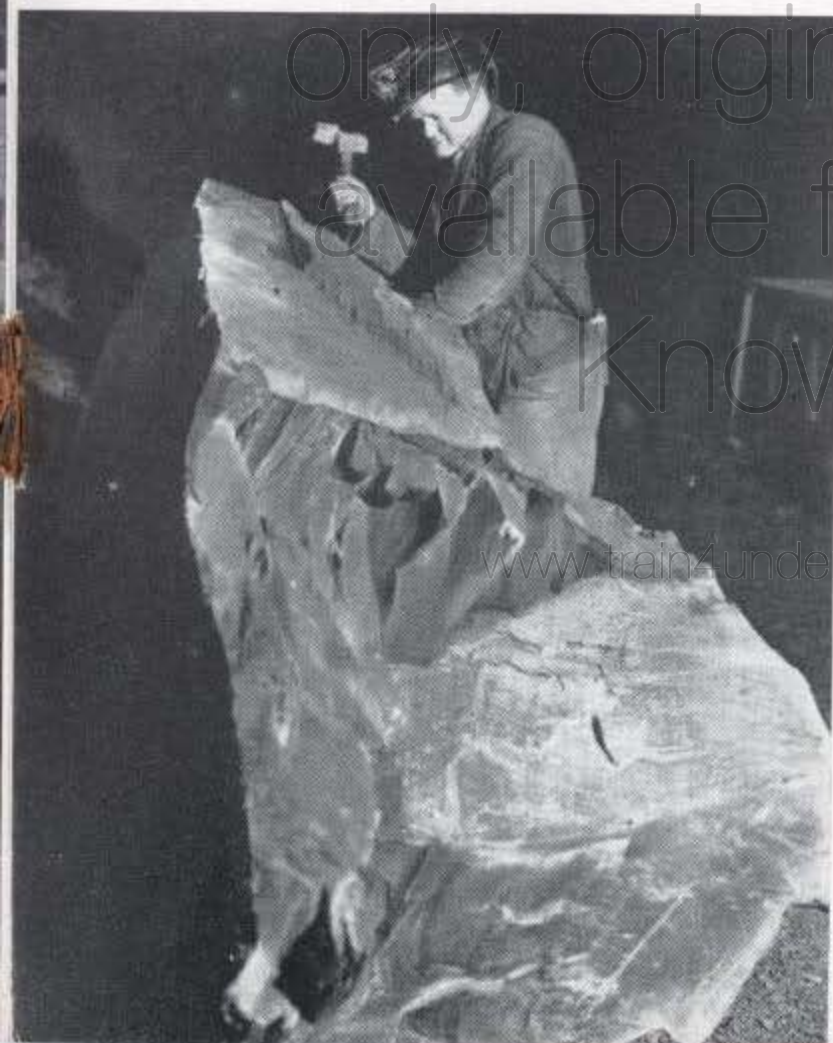
Across the approach level miners Lewis Griffiths and Joseph Freeman were engaged in similar work, widening in chamber “MB.11.”

Joe Freeman, who hails from Hull, is one of a growing group of newcomers from outside the traditional centre of slate mining and now working at Oakeley. He joined us after a long spell of

(Continued on page 27)

The big split, before—

—and after



HOLIDAY SNAPS COMPETITION RESULTS



First : J. T. Jones

LOOKING back in mid-winter on a summer holiday which has gone, the recollection becomes fonder, and the pleasure recalled much keener, when

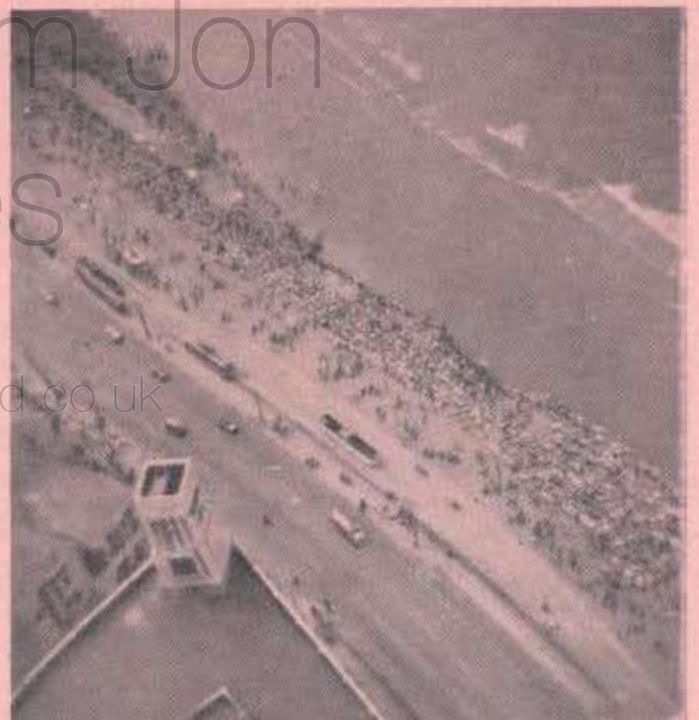
there are snaps to produce—pictures of a specially happy occasion, a beauty spot, or of children enjoying themselves—to heighten and widen the interest.

It is so with our prize-winning holiday snaps depicting three differing treatments of a single theme—holiday happiness at the seaside.

The winning snap, submitted by J. T. Jones, a Votty slatemaker, showing a group of young children independently engaged in private adventure, probing



Second: A. W. Evans



Third: Alwyn Jones



the mysteries of a warm pool, tells its own true story of a day spent at the seaside.

The tide has gone out ; the warm haze of the afternoon has left an older generation half asleep in deck chairs. The children, meanwhile, are close at hand, safe and happy, paddling in a shallow pool left by the tide.

The mood continues in the second prize snap—sent by Arthur W. Evans—showing the cousins John and Anwen braving the breakers at Sunny Rhyl.

Our third prizewinner—Alwyn Jones, Oakeley,—carries the theme literally to the extreme, a matter of 500 feet or so above sea level at the top of the Blackpool tower, there to picture, far below, the teeming holiday crowd so typical of Blackpool and the famous shore.

By way of further encouragement to the amateur photographers in our midst, we have selected for publication three other pictures which also catch the holiday mood, though in varying ways. John Evans, a Votty rockman, is shown with a scythe, indulging in haymaking in the Conway Valley at Trefriw. Seated on a boat drawn up on the beach at Conway is Ellen Margaret Roberts,



daughter of R. O. Roberts, Votty slate loader. Thomas Hughes sent us the snap of his daughter Mair consenting to a playful “hold-up” by a friend.



CABAN PICTURES

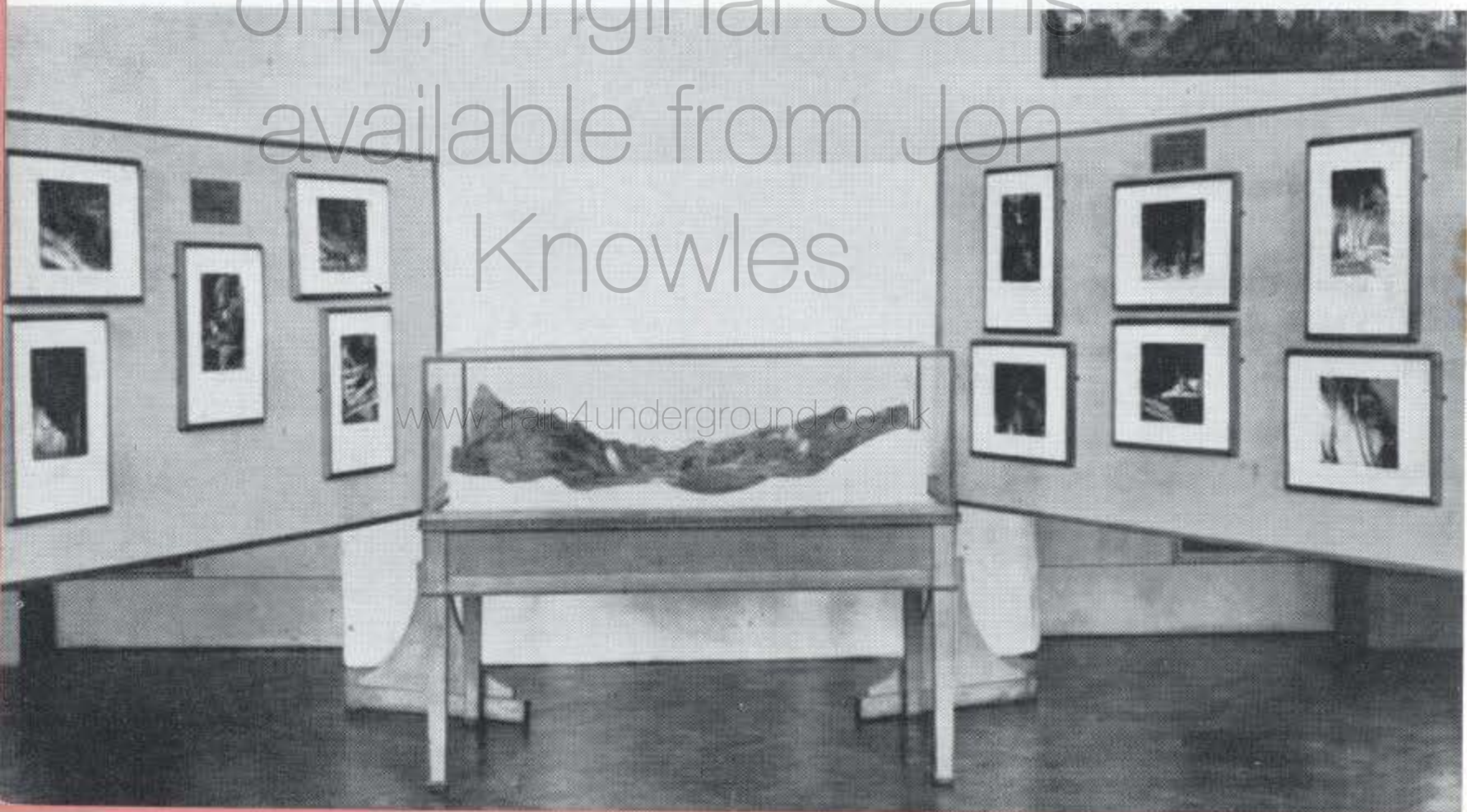
at National Museum of Wales

FROM TIME TO TIME *Caban* has endeavoured not only to picture the places in which we work, but also the district in which Oakeley and Votty quarrymen live. Aerial and other views of the Blaenau Ffestiniog slate quarrying district which we have reproduced, like those of our quarry workings themselves, have been much admired by a wide circle of readers. Not the least of our admirers, Dr. F. J. North, D.Sc., F.G.S., Director of the Department of Geology at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, asked us for enlarged copies of a representative selection of these photographs for the Museum's records of Welsh industry. Dr. North is exhibiting these in turn, a few at a time, in one of the galleries of the National Museum in conjunction with his quite remarkably exact and detailed scale model of the mountainous quarrying district of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

The physical features so accurately portrayed in the model are seen to better advantage in the enlarged reproduction to which we give pride of place in the middle pages of this issue.

Visitors to the National Museum at Cardiff, many of whom may be expected already to have some knowledge of the working of the coal mines which abound in the area, are thus enabled through the enterprise of Dr. North to see how the slate mining industry of North Wales, and Oakeley and Votty in particular, produce the commodity for which it is famed.

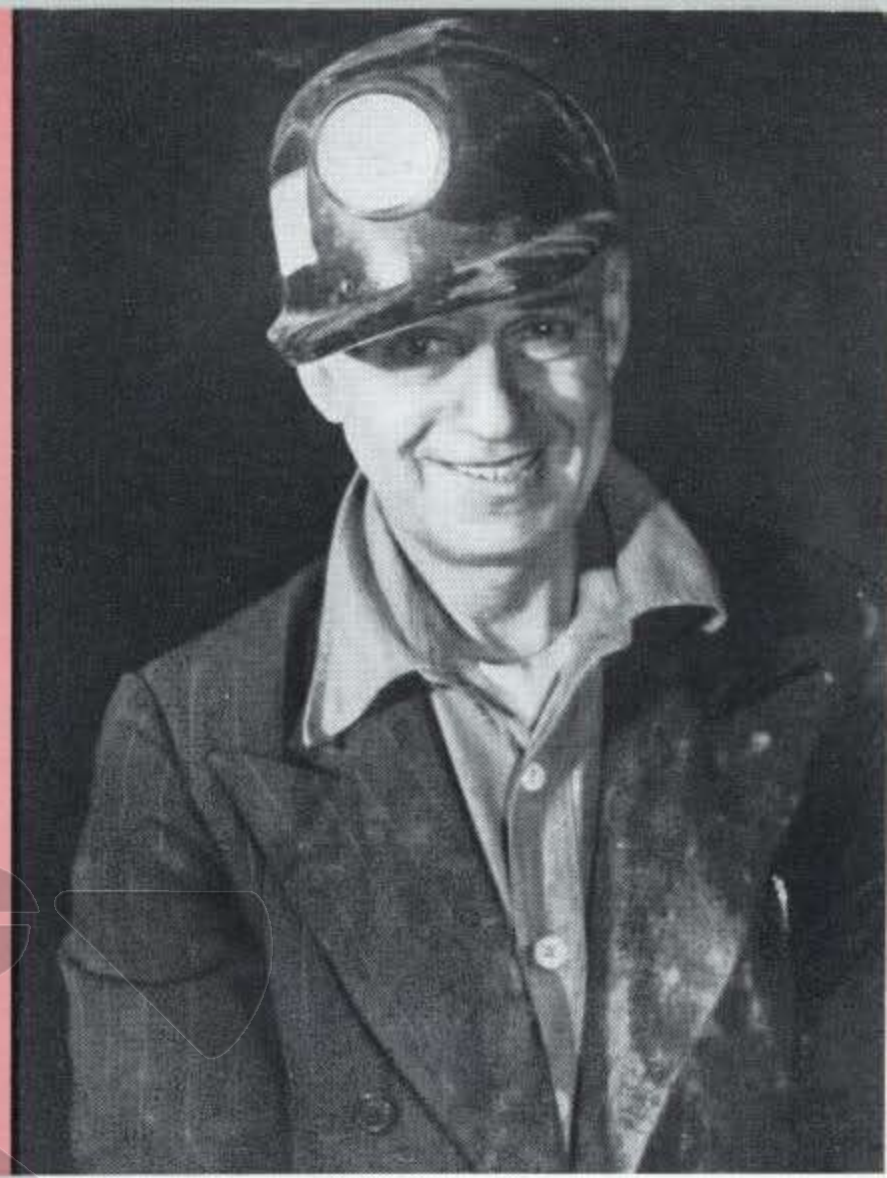
We are grateful to Dr. North for the interest he has shown in our efforts, for his permission to reproduce pictures of the Museum exhibit, and we are pleased to note that *Caban* has been able to contribute a little to the high purpose of the National Museum of Wales.



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NEWS EXCHANGE



Owen Morris Griffith

From Goldfields to Slate Mine

AFTER MANY YEARS spent in Canada working as a goldminer, Owen Morris Griffith, member of an old Penrhyn family, is back in his native village and, true to family tradition, has settled down to employment underground at Oakeley.

His father was William Griffith, one time Oakeley rockman.

Telling *Caban* that he was "home for good," Owen Griffith explained that he had left the goldfields of Northern Ontario, bringing his wife and son, because he had become "fed up with the cold."

"Up there, on Kirkland Lake, at this time of the year," he said, "one had to turn out with the thermometer reading 40 degrees below zero. Within half an hour of leaving the biting cold the miners—and I was one of them—hit the other extreme."

"We were dropped thousands of feet before reaching the quartz, the temperature leaping up meanwhile with every hundred feet of the descent."

Mining at 90 degrees

"At the rock face we would work stripped to the waist in a temperature approaching 90 degrees Fahr. I was an experienced hand, but the cold side of the job finally got me down. I got fed up with it and came home."

Owen Griffith emigrated in 1924 direct to the quartz mines, the deepest of which, in which he had worked, touching 8,000 feet. His home was in a typical Canadian mining town with a thoroughly cosmopolitan population. Welshmen from the quarries of North Wales and the coal mines of South Wales while they did not abound in the district were prominent among the citizens and were both heard and seen, particularly on "Dydd Gwyl Dewi." The area was notable for its mining, he said. In addition to gold there was yielded a substantial amount of nickel, silver and copper and cobalt.

Gwyl Dewi in Canada

St. David's Day was a big event, celebrated in style by all Welshmen in the district.



Blacksmith, Robert Shepherd

“It was there that we had a good old chin-wag in ‘yr hen iaith,’ talking of old times and old scenes. We did not forget the old country,” he said. “There were several with whom I was able to speak of home and of this area in particular, for among my Welsh friends were D. R. Jones, actually from Penrhyn, who, like me, had worked at Oakeley before emigrating. Another particular friend was Owen Caradog Davies, who had been a miner at Cwmorthin. We sang a bit, too, and had our own Welsh choir.”

War Veteran

A “veteran” of the 1914-18 war, in which he served with the 55th Welsh Division, Owen Griffith joined up in the last war with a unit known as the Canadian Veteran Guard. His guard duties took him all over the world—first as a muleteer, “loading and nursing mules on the long haul out to Karachi and Bombay.” On the return voyages he served as a guard in charge of German prisoners of war who were being shipped to prison camps in Canada. There were

trips to Australia, California and several to this country before the veteran of two wars was demobilised in 1946.

The world voyaging over, the long winter cold of Northern Ontario began to make itself felt. Owen Griffith decided to end his exile and return home.

Making the sparks fly

A split-second exposure in the Votty forge enabled *Caban’s* cameraman to “freeze” this cascade of sparks which were produced in one blow on the anvil by Robert Shepherd, the Votty blacksmith.

(Illustration on left).

In the right tradition

HARD WORK seems to be characteristic of the slate trade. An old friend of ours, Mr. T. J. Williams, Director of the firm of Messrs. Slocombe, Williams & Co., of Cardiff, established in 1855 and with whom we have done business for longer than we have records, is completing 80 years of active association with his firm—and thus with ours.

Mr. E. Ford, his co-director, tells us that Mr. Williams is in his 92nd year and remains active at his post. Mr. Williams attends regularly to business, arriving at the Cardiff office at 9 a.m. sharp daily, though nowadays he leaves at 12.30 p.m. to spend his afternoons at home.

We congratulate Mr. Williams, adding the fervent hope that he will long remain to sustain the tradition of the trade.

“Dior Twins”

ROCKMAN Cyril Lewis and Harold Williams, labourer of Votty, who up as “Dior Twins,” purporting to “model” the latest fashion in shortened skirts, were popular first prize winners at Manod carnival.

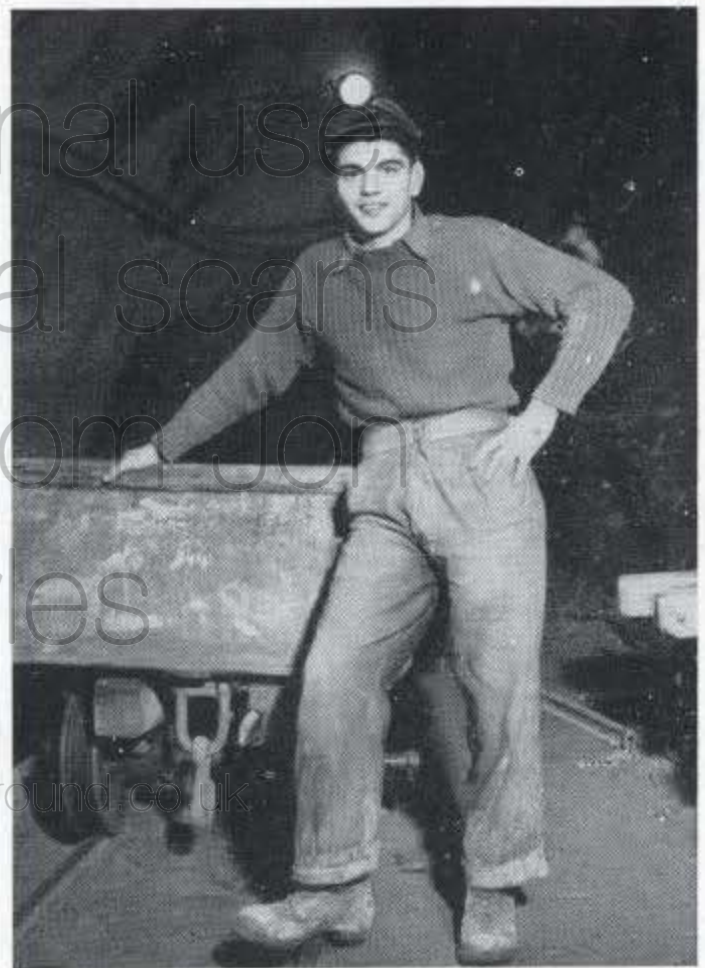
Senior Service Veteran

THE THREE military Services are well represented in our mines; aptly, the senior in this category is a veteran of the Senior Service—William Griffith Jones, ex-Royal Navy, now working underground at Votty. He joined the Navy in 1927 after a period as a mechanic. His experience has included service with almost all classes of fighting ships, notably the aircraft carriers “Implacable” and “Illustrious.” Some of his service was spent in the Western Approaches escorting merchant convoys and fighting enemy submarines. Our picture shows the naval pensioner expertly rolling a cigarette.



Oakeley Newcomer

ANOTHER newcomer—David Frederick Kashen, labourer at Oakeley—is a Manchester man who has joined us from the Parachute Regiment. The change from life aloft to a new career underground he appears to have taken in his stride. David Kashen has run the whole course of the “Red Berets’ ” training and on one occasion broke both legs when performing an exercise in delayed dropping.



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Oakeley and Votty Bandsmen

IN this happy snap we feature four of our number are stalwarts of the Royal Oakeley Silver Band, who led the way in our Carnival procession and who later carried off third prize in the

Class "B" contest at the Rhyl National Eisteddfod band competitions. From left to right are Anarawd Jones, Oakeley; Ieuan Jones, Votty; Hefin Williams, Oakeley, and John Roberts, Oakeley.



Votty Personality

THE genial figure snapped at Votty is former R.W.F. Sgt.-Instructor Edward R. Williams, now driver of the Tuxford Incline. Still carrying the military bearing that marked his career and success as a war-time physical training instructor, Edward Williams is an old Votty hand, having started at the quarry in 1921. He joined up at the outbreak of the last war as a Territorial, became a P.T. instructor, and was attached to the 29th Training Battn. instructing potential officers and N.C.O.s.



E. R. Williams

A Votty Caban



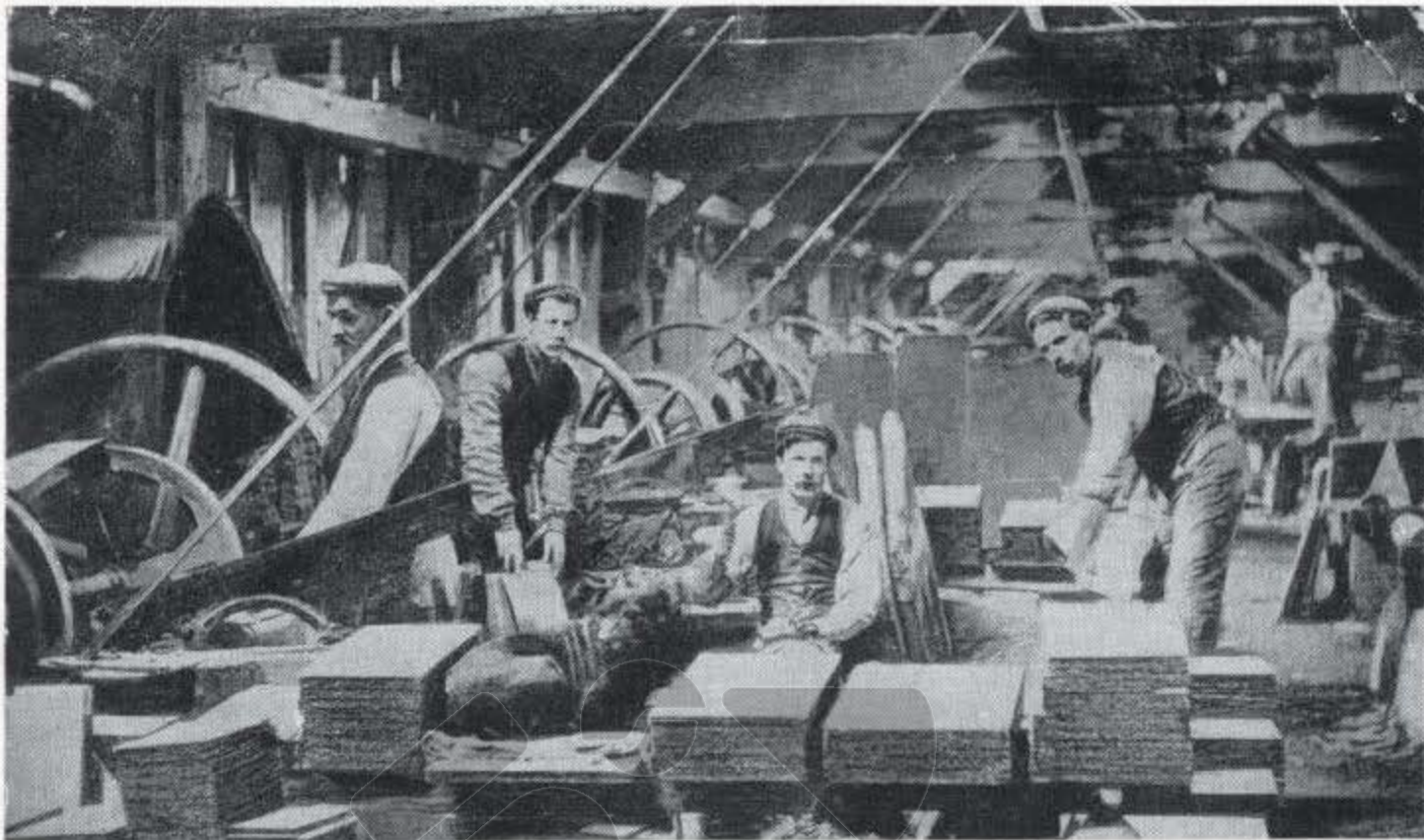
In this underground caban at Votty are some of the men whose work is featured in our "Floor to Floor" article. They are: R. W. Humphreys, J. T. Jones, D. A. Williams J. Morris Jones, D. O. Lloyd, Roderick Roberts and Owen G. Hughes.

Fluent Talkers



John Edwin Hughes (right) and his father Robert David Hughes (33 years at Oakeley "Q.4"), give one of their prize budgerigars a talking lesson. At the back in the cage is Joey, a fluent talker and the pet of the family.

Penybont



We are indebted to Hugh E. Hughes, fitter, for this interesting picture of personalities at the old Penybont Mill, Oakeley.

Shown in the photograph are: John Roberts (Dinas Road), William Walter Davies (Blaen Cae), Edwin Morris (Llwyngell), Thomas John Griffith

(Adwy Goch) and William Thomas (Gwaenydd Terrace).

Says Hugh Hughes: "The dog seen in the foreground was the dam of the champion Welsh terrier—Bryn Hir Ballad—reputed to be the perfect specimen and to have been the standard for all subsequent champions."



Chester Show winner

OFF duty we see Harry Daniels, of D.E., Oakeley, holding in the approved manner one of his prizewinning rabbits. His Dutch exhibits gained first and second prizes at the Chester Show.

"M" FLOOR CABAN

(see page 2)

THE lunch-time discussion of "current affairs" was in full swing when the picture (on page 2) was taken. The big stick wielded by the chairman is really in mild reproof, as the expressions of some of his auditors show. Present at the session were:—Lewis Griffith, William E. Jones, William S. Evans, Danny Kashen, Joseph Freeman, Gwilym B. Owen, Benjamin Jones and Owen Morris Griffith.

GOING DOWN AT OAKELEY *(Continued from page 17)*

service in the R.A.F. His duties brought him in 1946 to this neighbourhood where he married.

The lofty bridge, where had echoed the warning cries of "Enbyd!", spans "NB.6," a chamber worked by Richard Stoddart and John Edwin Hughes and devoted primarily to the production of raw material for the manufactures of our slab mill.

In the slab mill the blocks are machined, cut and planed to serve a variety of purposes, from headstones to kerbs, shelves and pastry

boards. Our viewpoint of the activity in "NB.6" was from the "M" Floor bridge just half way up the 120 feet high walls of the chamber. Down below the rockmen are working on a large "square" of slate from which they will split to order slabs of the dimensions and quality required by the machinists. The slabs are of hard quality New Vein, eminently suitable for the job. Later, as the rockmen work through, normal methods of slate-making will be resumed.



M.B.10: A start on New Vein



In the Old Vein, working through, at Votty.

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