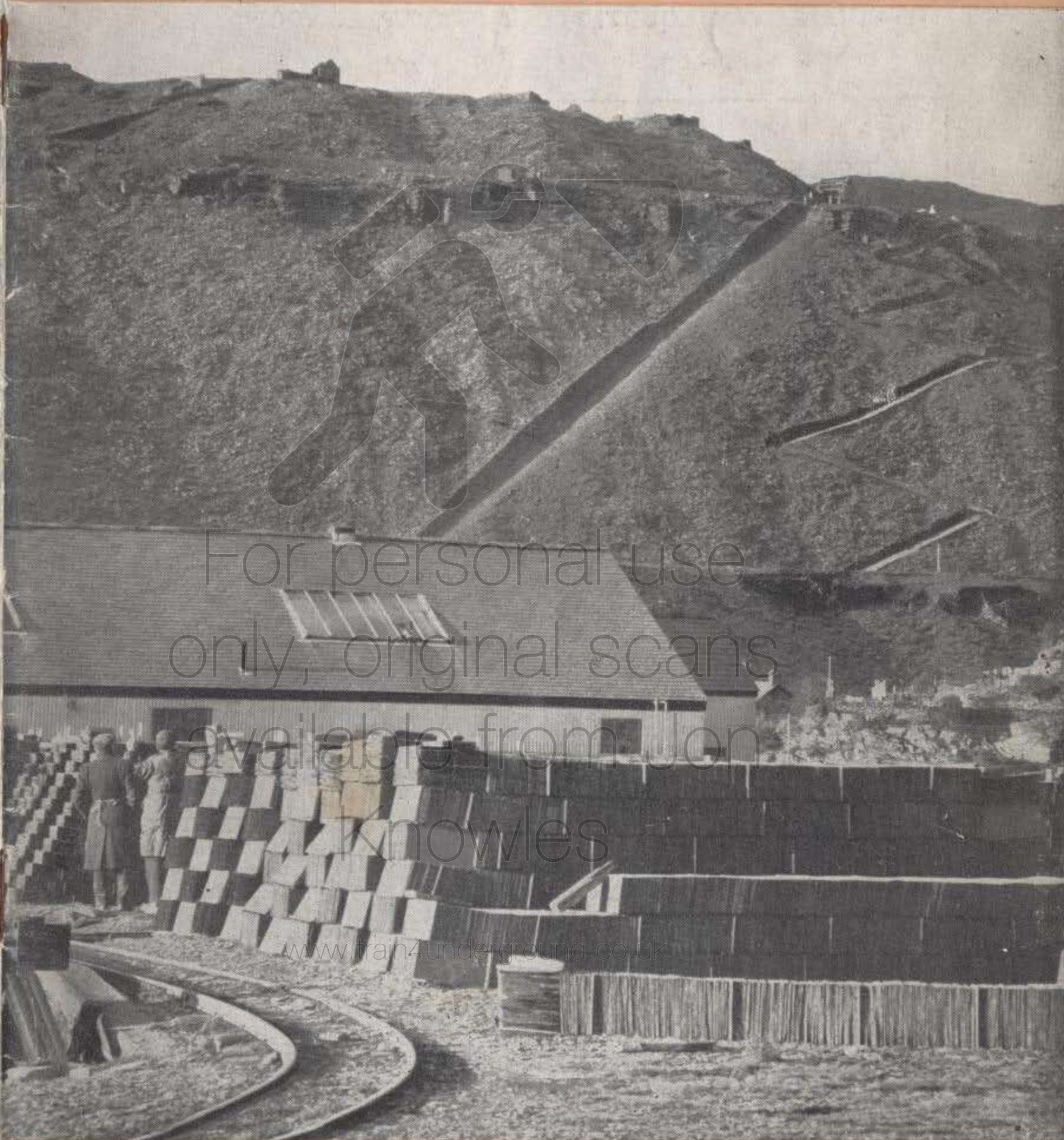


CABAN

JANUARY, 1958



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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.,
BLAENAU FFESTINIOG, NORTH WALES,
4 OLD MITRE COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

NEW YEAR MESSAGE

from

SIR CHARLES R. A. OAKELEY, BART.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to take advantage of this issue of "Caban" to send on behalf of all the Directors our very best wishes for the New Year.

May it be a most happy and prosperous year for all !

CHARLES OAKELEY

Chairman

- *Front Cover: Slates ready for despatch at the wharf and in the background a zig-zag track worn by countless quarrymen who used to climb this way to Oakeley.*

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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.

MEN AND MACHINES AGAINST WATER

“**G**LAW 'Stiniog” — Ffestiniog rain—is a catch phrase which conjures up in the minds of North Walian a picture of a dripping countryside—and our quarrymen know its meaning only too well! Outside the Snowdon mountain range, the Oakeley quarry rainfall record is one which nobody envies and elaborate and efficient arrangements have been developed to canalise the water which cascades from the hills in rainy periods and to ensure that the underground workings are kept dry.

Sternest battle

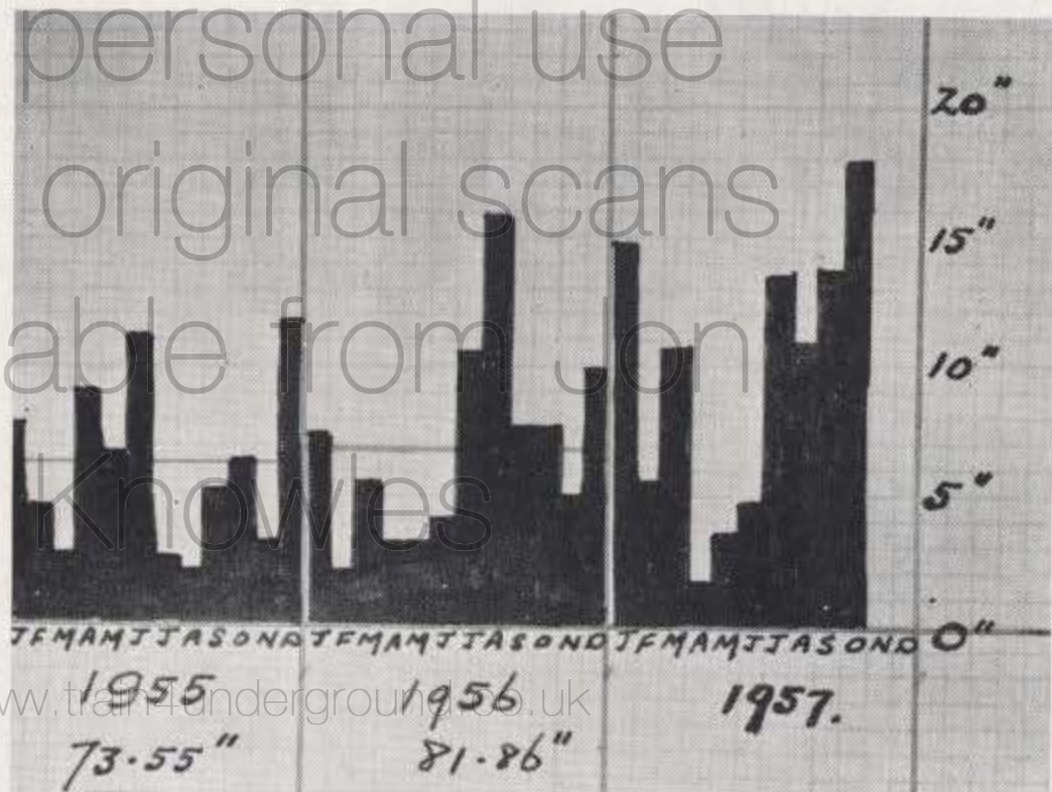
At the end of October the drainage systems at Oakeley and Votty quarries were severely tested. During the four days from the 27th to the 30th between twelve and thirteen inches of rain fell—the heaviest spell of rain ever experienced at the quarries—and it led to the sternest battle against water which the staffs have had to wage.

Chiefly it was a battle of the pumps. It went on day and night

for over a week at both quarries, and there were tense and anxious moments as the level of underground reservoirs in which excess water is collected—some are 60ft. deep—rose inch by inch towards the critical point.

But victory went to the batteries of electrically driven pumps operated by relays of experienced pumpmen. Extracting water at the rate of more than 8,000 gallons per minute, the pumps raised and discharged into surface water-courses nearly 80,000,000 gallons of water from the two quarries during the vital period.

Thus was the efficiency of the drainage arrangements proved under extraordinary pressure and



This diagram—a monthly rainfall record kept by Mr. Emlyn Jones, the Votty manager—shows the unusually high level of the rainfall over the four months July to October 1957, compared with the previous two years.

throughout the trying period the slate chambers and tunnels were kept free of water. Underground work went on uninterrupted.

It was not the four-day rainfall alone which accounted for the situation with which the quarry staffs were confronted. It was because the rain came at the end of an abnormally wet month on top of a summer of high rainfall, as is illustrated by the accompanying diagram. This shows the relevant section of the rainfall record kept at the Votty office.

As a result the ground around the quarries was already saturated, and when the month-end rain came, torrential at times, the water simply ran off the surface. Troughs, leats, trenches and ditches could not cope with it all.

Lakes full

From the 27th to the 30th, 12.8 inches of rain was registered at Oakeley (1,100 ft.), and 12.24 inches at Votty.

There were complications in the Votty area apart from the task of pumping. Llyn Bowydd and Llyn Newydd, two holding lakes at the 1,570 ft. level above Votty, were already full, and when the further rain came the main, or upper ditch, which is 15 ft. to 18 ft. wide, and takes the overflow from both lakes away from the Votty workings, was breached.

Through a gap, four to five yards wide, the water poured over the hillside and down the Rhiw Bach incline belonging to an adjoining quarry, undermining it in places and releasing tons of earth and debris.

Rush of water

Then the water found its way into the main Votty culvert, a 12 ft. wide channel running some 400 yards down the mountainside. The culvert coped successfully with the rush of water, withstood the battering of the debris brought down with it, and carried the flood over the danger area.

That it did so is due to the constant attention paid to the maintenance of the drainage system, extensive repairs having been carried out to the culvert during the summer and its surface re-cemented.

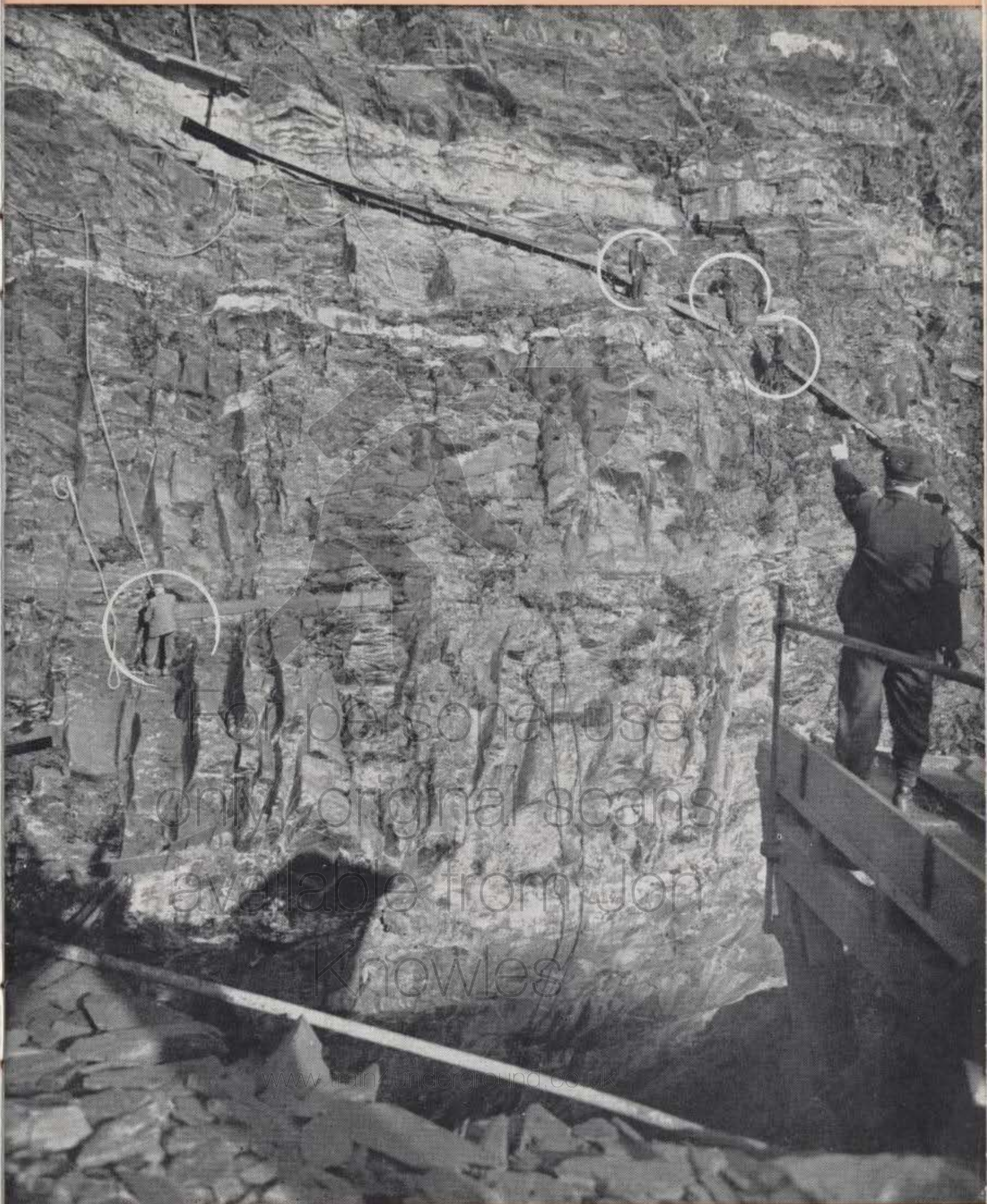
For a short period the mill floor level at Votty was flooded up to a maximum depth of eight inches and emergency transport was arranged to convey the men from the adit entrance of the mine at the end of the shift. But, as at Oakeley, the underground workings were in no way affected and were kept free of water by the hardworking pumpmen.

Temporary bridging

Ten men were employed for three days on the repair of the breach in the upper ditch high on the mountain. Some 50 tons of material was brought across the waterway by temporary bridging.

Staffs were in constant attendance from dawn to midnight during that anxious week, but at the end of it they had the satisfaction of knowing that the drainage and pumping systems had stood up splendidly to their greatest test.

DRAINAGE JOB ON "Y BÔN"



As an illustration of the constant attention given to the drainage system, men are shown renewing troughs on the rock face above the entrance to the Oakeley mine. See "All in a day's work" on page 7.

Trio with 120 years service

Our despatch department

PAYING a long-delayed visit to the sales and despatch staff who work in a sort of splendid isolation in a bungalow named Erw Fair, situated between the Oakeley quarry and the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, *Caban* found a genial trio whose combined service to our company totals 120 years.

They are Pierce Roberts, the despatch manager, who joined the staff of Votty in 1914; William O Williams, who was with him from 1921, and Stanley C. Evans, who entered the service of the Oakeley company at Portmadoc in 1919.

Besides these "veterans", there is a fourth member of the staff, Gwilym Lloyd Jones, a newcomer by comparison though he has served the company since he left school ten years ago.

It was in 1934 that the despatch department was transferred to Erw Fair from Portmadoc, where the three older members well remember the slates arriving from the quarries on the "Lein Bach" the narrow gauge railway to be shipped to various ports.

Now all slates are transported by rail and road to every part of Britain and to ports for shipping overseas—mainly to Germany, Denmark, Holland and Ireland, but also to various other countries from time to time. Despatch, consigning and invoicing are the responsibilities of the Erw Fair staff.

The manager and his two senior colleagues have two things in common: they all live at Portmadoc and are keenly interested in civil defence. Pierce Roberts is a member of the Royal Observer Corps; W. O. Williams a special constable, and Stanley Evans was during the last war the divisional air-raid warden for South Caernarvonshire.



In the main office at Erw Fair are, seated at their manager, temporarily out of his

But outside his work, Mr. Roberts' chief interest is campanology. He is secretary of the bellringers of St. John Parish Church, Portmadoc, who are members of the North Wales Association of Change Ringers. He started bellringing 25 years ago, and his enthusiasm is undiminished, for he and his fellow bellringers visit various places to practise their art. Mr. Roberts modestly mentioned that he had rung several full peals—and a peal consists of at least 5,000 changes.

The hobbies of the other members of the staff are less spectacular. Mr. Williams was content to say that he was a keen gardener, while the youngest member of the staff excels at snooker and is very knowledgeable about soccer.



desks, William O. Williams (left) and Stanley C. Evans, with whom Pierce Roberts, the despatch own office, is checking some papers. At the telephone is Gwilym Lloyd Jones.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

LIVING and working among the mountains as they do, climbing in steep, rugged places holds no terrors for quarrymen. Rockmen are, of course, adept at it but even the carpenters are not averse to a little rock-climbing when the need arises! It's all in a day's work!

On page 5 the Oakeley carpenters, Evan G. Jones, Austin Lewis and Emyr Davies, are seen with rockman W. E. Williams high up on "Y Bôn," the precipitous mass of rock towering above the entrance to the Oakeley underground workings which is directly below them.

They were engaged in renewing the wooden troughs which are strategically placed across the face of the rock to catch surface water and so prevent it entering the cavity of the K balance incline—and from seeping into the joints in the rock and making it insecure.

Working some 100 feet up and traversing narrow ledge-walks, even with the occasional use of ropes and chains, demands sure-footedness and a head for heights, and these the Oakeley carpenters evidently possess.

Pointing to the men on the rock face is the K-balance engine-man, David Hughes.

FAMILIAR as I am with the outside of a Blaenau Ffestiniog slate quarry, —the mountain-sides covered with slate rubble, the geometrical lines of the horizontal tracks and slanting inclines dividing the slopes at intervals, the stone huts perched on plateaux here and there—I had never been down into the interior of one. I had not realised that the mountain is virtually hollowed out—right up into the peaks and down into the depths—and divided into 30 floor-levels intersected by vast towering chambers, one above the other.

Excitement

On the day I visited the Oakeley quarry, we climbed to the main office and having talked to the manager, signed the visitors' book and been introduced to our guide, our party was soon slithering down the steep track leading towards the entrance of the quarry.

"Made your will?" quipped a bass voice. "See you later, if the cable doesn't break" called another jocularly as we were led into a stone hut to be fitted up with electric torches. A man with a kindly face, smiling but silent, slung a heavy oblong battery round each one's neck, and fixed the torch to the strap in front.

There was an atmosphere of excitement and strangeness, of not knowing what was going to happen next, as we went out of the hut. We found ourselves at the top of a very steep incline about 100 yards long, at an angle of at least 50 degrees, on which were two trolleys, one going up as the other went down. These trolleys were shaped like square platforms, enclosed by a narrow waist-high iron rail, and the cable on which they travelled looked appallingly slender and frail.

Wisps of vapour

"I hope the ladies have good nerves," said the guide mildly. The ladies (and some of the men, too, I'm sure) felt something of a qualm as they looked down the steep slope into a jagged gap, a dark hole in the mountain-side, with wisps of vapour drifting from it.

UNDERGROUND — through a

By Miss Peggy Mills, of Cheshire, Merionethshire. Miss Mills is an

Down we went, travelling very fast and with that feeling of incredulity one feels in an aeroplane, until we arrived safely at the bottom. Now, looking upwards, we saw the scene in reverse—the patch of sky far above and the blue light slanting down. The darkness of the quarry was to be our element for the next two hours.

"Be careful, it's slippery underfoot," said the guide as we set off in Indian file along the first of the innumerable winding passages laid with narrow-gauge tracks.

Dramatic scenes

The quarry is something like one imagines a coal mine to be, but there is nothing at all grim about it. We could walk upright everywhere and, moreover, slate is clean; the dust it creates is white. This white dust can be as sinister to the quarryman as black coal dust is to coal-miners and once many suffered from silicosis. But now, by various means, the danger is being averted.

One method we saw illustrated is simple. A bag is fixed round the point of each power-driven drill and this effectively traps the dust.

The next two hours produced a series of dramatic scenes. In the intervals we would make our way gingerly along narrow passages, which twisted and turned so that we never could see far ahead. All we could see were the shadowy silhouettes of the people moving along in front, lit by the shifting glimmer of our lamps.

Suddenly the guide halted us and we found ourselves in the middle of one of the chambers where the quarrying is done. This was a huge, echoing cavern, as big as a church interior, whose walls tapered gradually inwards and upwards.

High up, rockmen worked on the face of the slate to make it safe or climbed up

AT OAKELEY

woman's eyes

who has close family associations with art teacher at a London school.

on to ledges to drive pegs into the slate for fixing safety chains. The word safety, however, has a different meaning down there. With apparent nonchalance, Johnny (at the request of our guide) climbed up a swaying rope-ladder on to a high sloping ledge, fixed his chain round his thigh, and did a little dance, waving his arms over his head, to exhibit his freedom of movement.

It is here that he and his mate place charges for blasting the rock, which is done at a fixed time near the end of the day. The warning hooter can be heard down in the valley. Enormous chunks of slate, sometimes as big as a house, fall to the floor of the chamber, and there they are split into pieces of manageable size. This is done by drilling a hole and then giving a cunning tap with a hammer in exactly the right place, so that the slate falls easily apart. The pieces are then manhandled with crow-bars and rollers, until they can be mechanically loaded on to trolleys and hauled by cable up to the surface.

Enormous pumps

Each stage, or floor, of the mine is known by a letter; we went down to floor L, and below us were six more, R being the lowest. An immensely long, broad, steep incline runs from the top to the bottom of the mine. We were taken on to a bridge over the incline and as our eyes got accustomed to the darkness we could see, far below, tiny figures moving about, their lamps twinkling in the gloom.

We saw one of the enormous pumps which extracts the water from the mine at the rate of thousands of gallons a day, and heard the unseen torrent that roars at the bottom of a deep pit, before it flows as a stream into the valley.

Our guide volunteered as much information as we were ready to assimilate,

but for my part, I was gazing about me, speechless, most of the time I was down there. I feel that I would like to go again and ask a lot more questions, not only of the guide but of the quarrymen we saw underground. They made an extraordinary impression of easy warm-hearted friendliness and natural courtesy and I feel sure they are exceptional in this way.

Like a dream

The quarry is like another world—of fantastic heights and seemingly unfathomable depths, hollow echoing sounds and glimmering lights. I thought of Dante's *Inferno*, though a very cheerful one. It is like a dream—but never a nightmare.

The journey back to the surface was a swift transition into the warm enveloping air of the daylight world, and a very different working scene. Slates are dressed in big stone sheds, which have sky-lights in the roof, and the prevailing colour is blue-grey and white. Quarrymen work in groups of four; two above ground and two below. The two underground send up the slate they have quarried, marked with their initials and the symbol of its chamber of origin, and their two surface partners split it again into smaller pieces to be sawn on a travelling circular saw.

There is a row of these saws down the middle of the shed, opposite a row of three-sided compartments separated by a series of projecting walls. Two men occupy each of these compartments, arranging them individually and sometimes sticking photographs and cuttings on the walls.

Joy to watch

Here the slates are dressed and trimmed, and it is a joy to watch this being done. One man sits on a low wooden stool with his legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankles. He reaches for a piece of slate, and supports it partly against his thigh and partly against a piece of stone fixed in the ground. The slate is now only about 25 inches long, 15 inches wide and four or five inches thick.

Continued on page 25

Farewell to a veteran

QUARRYMEN at Bonc Goedan caban in October bade farewell to a veteran, an occasion tinged with sadness for it marked the close of an exceptionally long, if not unique, record of service at the Oakeley Quarry.

It was the retirement of Owen Griffith, slatemaker, the oldest of the quarrymen, and one whose working association with the quarry extended over 63 years—a life-time of service by any standards in an industry in which conditions to-day are vastly different from what they were in Owen Griffith's earlier days. So ingrained was the habit of early rising that up to the time of his retirement at the age of 77, Owen Griffith still walked a mile or so daily to the quarry to arrive at about 6 a.m., long before the normal starting hour.

Presentation

Men from other cabanau joined those at Bonc Goedan to say a few parting words to Owen Griffith and to wish him health and happiness in his retirement, and to witness a presentation from his workmates of a token of their esteem.



Owen Griffith joins in singing a hymn

The gift was handed to Owen Griffith by the chairman of the caban, John Griffith, who referred to his notable service to the quarry and wished him well. Many others supplemented the chairman's remarks, among them Evan R. Jones, Austin Lewis, Eric Thomas, Ellis Roberts and Ben Thomas. To end the ceremony the men joined in singing the Welsh hymn "Calon Lan."

Presentation scene in the Caban



AR ÔL UGAIN MLYNEDD

FEL llawer llanc ieuanc o'm blaen, f'gadewais innau y chwarel i wella f'amgylchiadau, ond hirfelyn hudol-aeth y medi ni ddaeth i'm rhan. Mewn amgylchiadau anhawdd, erchyll braidd, penderfynais fel yr afradlon gynt, "gyfodi a dod adre."

Fel y digwydd yn aml i ddyn mewn amgylchiadau cyffelyb, ofnwn eu bod yn fwy na mi fy hunan. Cefais fy addysgu yn 'Stiniog—mewn ysgol a chapel a chabannau yr Oakeley—fod dyn yn fwy na'i amgylchiadau. Braint fawr i mi felly oedd cerdded hen lwybrau bro fy nghynefin; gweld ambell wyneb cyfeillgar a theimlo rhyw adeiladwaith gyfrin oedd yn drech nac unrhyw anfadwaith a'm meddianai.

Cam mawr ymlaen

Wedi ail ddechreu yn y chwarel synais at brinder y gweithwyr. 'Roedd y rybelwyr bach i gyd yn Gloddfa Ganol. Cam mawr ymlaen cyn i mi adael y chwarel oedd penodi chwarelwr "Bob Morgan" i hyfforddi rybelwyr bach a'u cynorthwyo. Cerdded o fonc i fonc a chwilio am ambell rybelwr oedd yn hawlio y rhan helaethaf o'i amser. Cam bwrpasol iawn oedd eu cael i un bonc. i'w hyfforddi gan wr profiadol. Dod a'r disgyblion at yr athraw sydd gywir.

Hyfrydwch mawr oedd sylwi fod peiriant wedi ei osod i dynnu'r llwch ymaith pan fo'r llif yn llifio. Teimlwn braidd yn euog un dydd gan i mi droi clwt o flaen y bwrdd ai ollwng, ac yr oedd llwch o'm cwmpas. Rhaid cydweithio yn gywir i ddileu hwn.

Hen elyn haerllug sy'n ein clwyfo yn 'Stiniog, yn neilltuol yn y chwarel, ydyw'r gaeaf. Pleser digymysg oedd derbyn yr "electric fire" i bob bwrdd. Byddai fy nhraed bôb amser yn oer wrth holhti ers talwm. Er nad yw'r ychwanegiad buddiol hwn yn "complete central heating" mae'n gam mawr ymlaen, a diolch am dano.

Rhyfeddol i mi wrth droedio o'm gwaith oedd gweld pump o fuses y Crosville yn Bonc Coedan i gludo'r

gweithwyr. Sylwais fod ffordd wedi ei phalmantu o'r swyddfa heibio i Fonc Shafft a "Bryn Tirion" i'r brif ffordd. Nid oes ofod i mi draethu ymadroddion fy meddwl—"The whole creation is homeward bound".

Dyrchafiad

Fel pob rybelwr daeth dyrchafiad i minnau fyned yn "jermion" (*journeyman*). Mae amgylchiadau wedi eu gweddnewid yn arw iawn. Synnais at y datblygiad mawr o'r "average". Yng ngwyneb haul, llygaid a goleuni mae chwarelwyr 'Stiniog yn nes i seren y pegwm (a rydd gyfeiriad yn y nos) nag a feddyliais.

I ba bwrpas mae mwyafrif yr agorydd yn cadw dim ond un chwarelwr allan? Yn neilltuol felly lle mae digonedd o gerrig. Nid yw hyn yn ddatblygiad nac ychwanegiad i neb na dim, na chwarelwr na chreigiwr na chwarel. Allwn i yn fy myw a deall y cam yma.

O dipyn i beth daethum i ymgydna-byddu a'r "bwrdd mawr". Wel, yn wir, dyma naid fawr er budd pawb. Dyma'r oruchwyliaeth yn dwyn datblygiad gwyddonol i briodas ac ymdrechion gweithwyr gwerin gwlad er ychwanegiad cyfoethog i'r diwydiant llechi. Melus moes mwy.

Colled

Siom fawr a syndod ddaeth i mi yn y caban ar awr ginio. Nid oes yma na'r diwylliant na'r drefn a ddisgwyliwn. Colled fawr yw hyn, nid yn unig i ieuencid y chwarel ond i fywyd cymdeithasol y cylch. Bu dylanwad y diwylliant oedd yng nghabanau'r chwarel yn arddeliad, addurn ac anrhydedd nid yn unig i'r chwarelwyr ond i'r cylch, i Gymru ac i ddynoliaeth.

Pleser a hyfrydwch mawr i mi ydyw cael cymdeithasu a chydweithio a chyfeillion yn y chwarel eto. Troedio hen lwybrau bro fy mebyd. Profi o'r newydd rin y gyfeillach.

J.G.M.

[Tybed a garai rhywun o gydweithwyr J.G.M. wneud sylwadau ar yr hyn a ysgrifennodd.]

Repairing a high-level bridge

OUTSIDE the routine work of maintaining the tools, services and equipment needed for the production of slate there is hardly anything to do with the quarry that the engineering departments cannot tackle.

An example of the versatility of the men was the repair last autumn of the high-level Pen-y-Bont bridge which carries the quarry railway from Oakeley to the slate despatch wharf at Blaenau Ffestiniog over the British Transport Commission's branch line between the town and the north coast of Wales.

The central span of the bridge is some 80 feet high and is maintained by the Commission, but the two end spans are the quarry's responsibility. The job last autumn was to renew one of the end spans, and this was carried out under the supervision of Idris Williams, the Oakeley engineer, with Evan G. Jones,

the quarry carpenter, as his chief assistant.

The work involved the removal of the two main wooden beams and cross-members, their replacement by steel joists, re-surfacing and relaying the railway. Working about 35 ft. above the embankment which falls steeply to the floor of the ravine, the men, making ingenious use of winch tackle and metal rollers, removed the massive wooden beams and manoeuvred two heavy steel joists across the gap in which the new span was built up.

Incidentally, the original bridge, supported on wooden structures, is believed to have been built about 1852, and its builder was Thomas Williams, joiner, grandfather of Idris Williams. The branch railway below enters a tunnel through the mountain a short distance beyond the bridge.

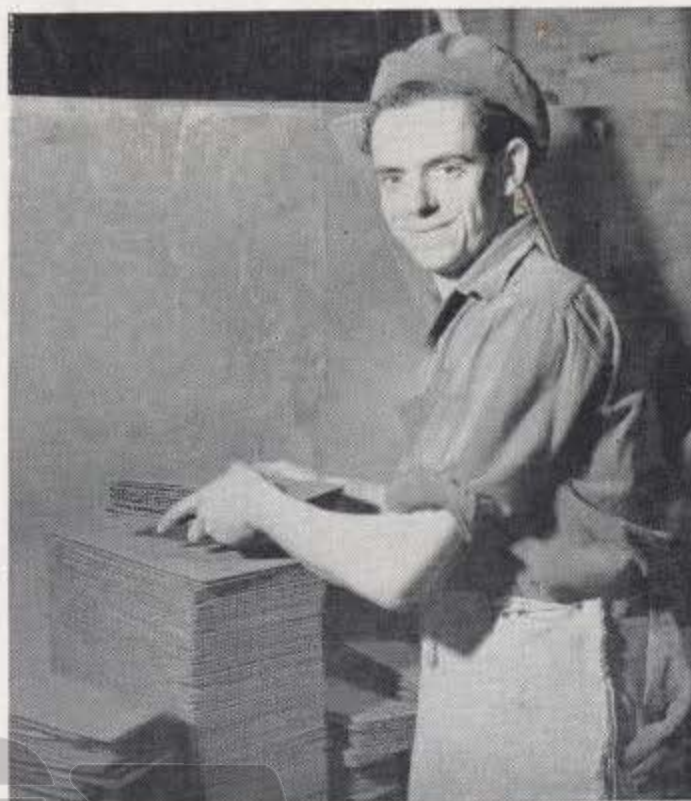
The rebuilt end span is on the right.



They met in Malaya

AFTER their spell of national service, mostly performed in Malaya where they took part in jungle campaigns against terrorists, two young men have been welcomed back to Oakeley—Vivian Jones, slatemaker at Bonc Shafft mill, and Robert Richard Evans, a rockman whom *Caban* photographed underground on N Floor.

Both served with the 2nd Battalion, R.W.F., though in different companies, and they like to remember their only meeting during their twenty months' sojourn in that distant land. By a coincidence they met at the same time another Oakeley boy, Vincent Jones



Vivian Jones

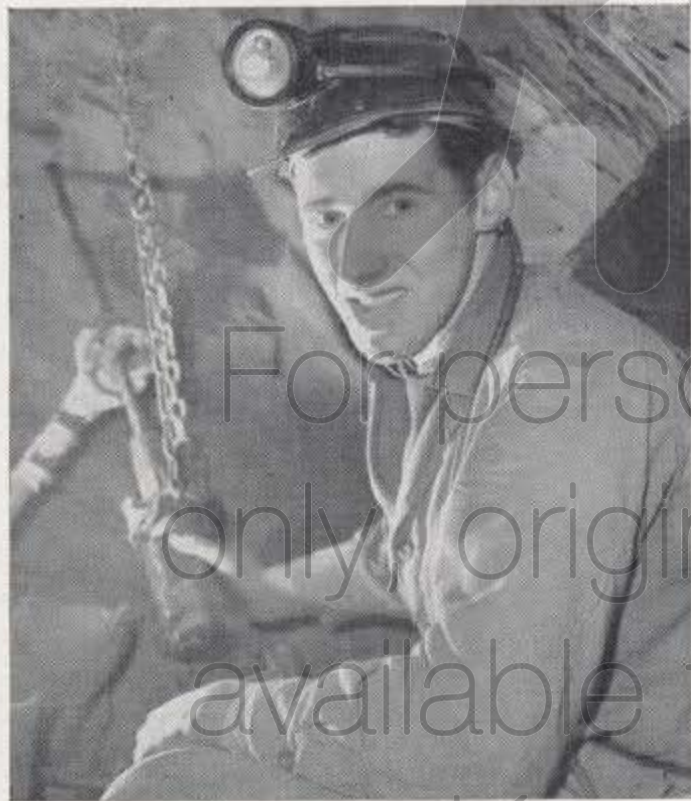
who, having joined the battalion later, had followed them out to Malaya.

The reunion of this Oakeley trio took place at Christmas, 1956, at a village called Tampin, then the battalion headquarters, and the pleasure of that meeting so far from home can well be imagined.

Vivian Jones, who was 21 in October, returned to "civvy street" some four months before Robert Richard Evans who got back in August and almost immediately resumed working at Oakeley.

Neither was very anxious to talk about his experiences with the infantry in Malaya, and perhaps their feelings may be summed up in the words of Vivian who said: "With plenty of activities such as sport it was not so bad after all!"

Vivian managed to get seven days' leave, which he spent in Singapore, but Robert was not so lucky. He had no leave at all while in Malaya.



Robert Richard Evans

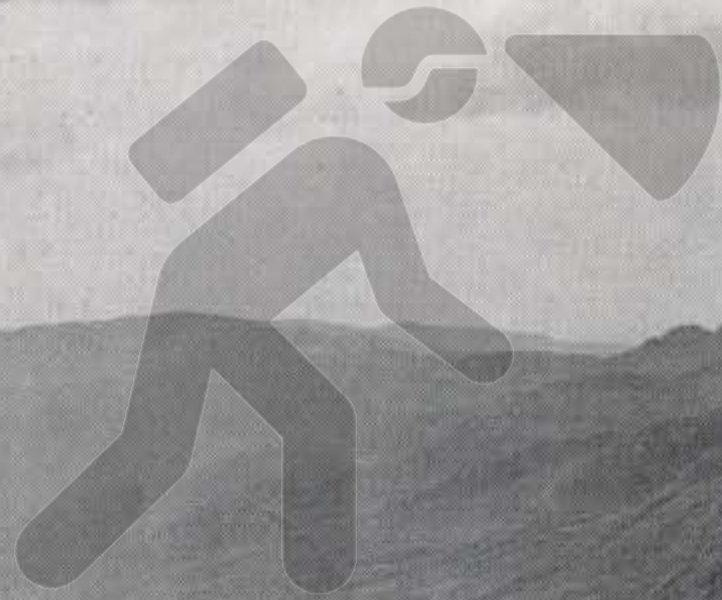
FROM OVERSEAS

AMONG 300 to 400 visitors to the Oakeley Quarry in 1957 were a party of 25 people who spent the month of August at Blaenau Ffestiniog, participating in an Ecumenical Work Camp during which they did a great deal of good work in the town. In two

parties they were granted facilities at Oakeley to see "the main local industry" and enjoyed the experience. They represented many countries, including Germany, Austria, U.S.A., Finland, Switzerland, Hungary, Italy and Ireland.

Panorama – our quarries in their setting

This special panoramic photograph, taken by "Caban's" photographer from the Votty Quarry, shows the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in its mountain setting, the dominant feature of which is the Moelwyn range.



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After many years

IT is pleasing to see two of our former quarrymen back at Oakeley after many years spent either in war service or pursuing other forms of livelihood. John Gwilym Morris returned to slate-making after 21 years and, he says, he has found conditions very different from what they were when he was previously a quarryman for some twelve years.

After five years in the army during the second world war, he took up other work and eventually decided that he preferred what he called the permanence of employment at Oakeley. He told *Caban* that he had found great changes in quarrying, especially in the methods of dealing with the slate, which had improved considerably, the big diamond saw and other equipment making the work easier as well as speeding-up production.

One thing that "surprised" him was that buses carried the men daily to their work instead of them having to walk as they did when he was previously a quarryman.

The one change that gave him cause for regret was in the atmosphere of the



John Gwilym Morris.

BETWEEN

caban ; there were not, in his view, the constructive discussions that used to characterise the half-hour lunch-time break. There was a time when a caban could muster four or five men able to discourse informatively on many subjects debated—and they covered a pretty wide field—but it was rare to find such speakers to-day. The caban had lost its "substance," he thought. "But having become accustomed to the work again, I am happy to be back among the quarrymen," he added.



Eric Jones.

John Gwilym Morris discusses these points in a Welsh article on page 11.

Back at Oakeley, too, is ex-serviceman Eric Jones who had been away for eighteen years. He entered the quarry straight from school and was 20 when the war began. He joined the R.W.F. and took part in the invasion of Normandy, going in not long after "D-Day."

While in action at Caen he was wounded, his left hand being badly

Family links at Bonc Shafft

injured by shrapnel. He spent some time in hospital, undergoing skin-grafting operations, and while there he learned leather work. This stood him in good stead when he returned to Blaenau Ffestiniog and helped him to earn a living.

Then for seven years Eric Jones wove carpets in a local factory. That occupation came to an end and, finding that his hand was strong enough for slate-making, he decided to become a quarryman again. "I can manage the work now without much difficulty," said Eric Jones. His hobby is music, his favourite instrument the guitar, and for a time he played as a member of a local dance band.

Votty man bags a badger



WHILE *Caban* photographer was taking the snapshots (which appear overleaf of the men who work in the Bonc Shafft mill we discovered an almost unbroken family connection with Oakeley going back to the year 1869. In that year a Richard Jones entered the quarry at the age of nine and worked there for 53 years. He died in 1922, four years after his son, Richard Jones, joined the quarry at the age of 17. Except for the period of his service in the second world war, Richard Jones (pictured top left in the set of twelve snapshots) has always worked at Oakeley, and now, in the same caban, is his son, Edgar (pictured immediately below his father), apprentice slate-maker, who, at 15, is Oakeley's youngest worker.

Another father-and-son combination are Cynwal Williams (fourth, 3rd row, set of 16), who has worked at Oakeley for 30 years, except for the war years 1939-45, when he served with the Royal Engineers in North Africa and Italy, and his son, Glyn, aged 18 (second in the same row). Glyn has been at Oakeley for nearly three years.

A third father-and-son combination at Bonc Shafft are John Gwilym Jones (first in set of 16), who was joined after the photographs were taken by his son Gareth.

Our snapshots include those of the chairman of the caban, Caradoc Davies, the secretary, Brian Roberts, and treasurer, Hugh Idris Roberts.

AN exhibit which aroused much interest at Votty was this badger held by John Henry Williams, a Votty under-manager. His car struck and killed the animal on the road to Croesor. He glimpsed it momentarily in the gleam of the headlights, but could not avoid it. The badger was said to be one of the biggest seen locally.

Bonc Shafft Snapshots

Opposite (from left) :

1st Row : John Gwilym Jones, Thomas Hughes, Ben Thomas, Glyn Roberts.

2nd Row : Elias Roberts, Emlyn Williams, Wm. H. Jones, Vivian Jones.

3rd Row : Herman Jones, Glyn Williams, Eric W. Jones, Cynwal Williams.

4th Row , Brian Roberts, Henry Parry, Ieuan Davies, Caradog Davies.

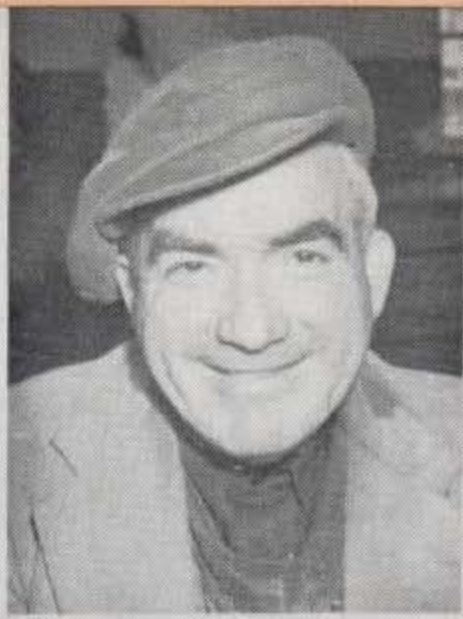
Below (from left) ,

1st Row : Richard Jones, J. Gwilym Morris, Evan L. Evans, Rt. Thomas Jones.

2nd Row : Edgar Jones, Hugh Idris Roberts, Edward Jones, George Penny.

3rd Row : John S. Williams, David O. Williams, Dewi P. Williams, Eric Thomas.



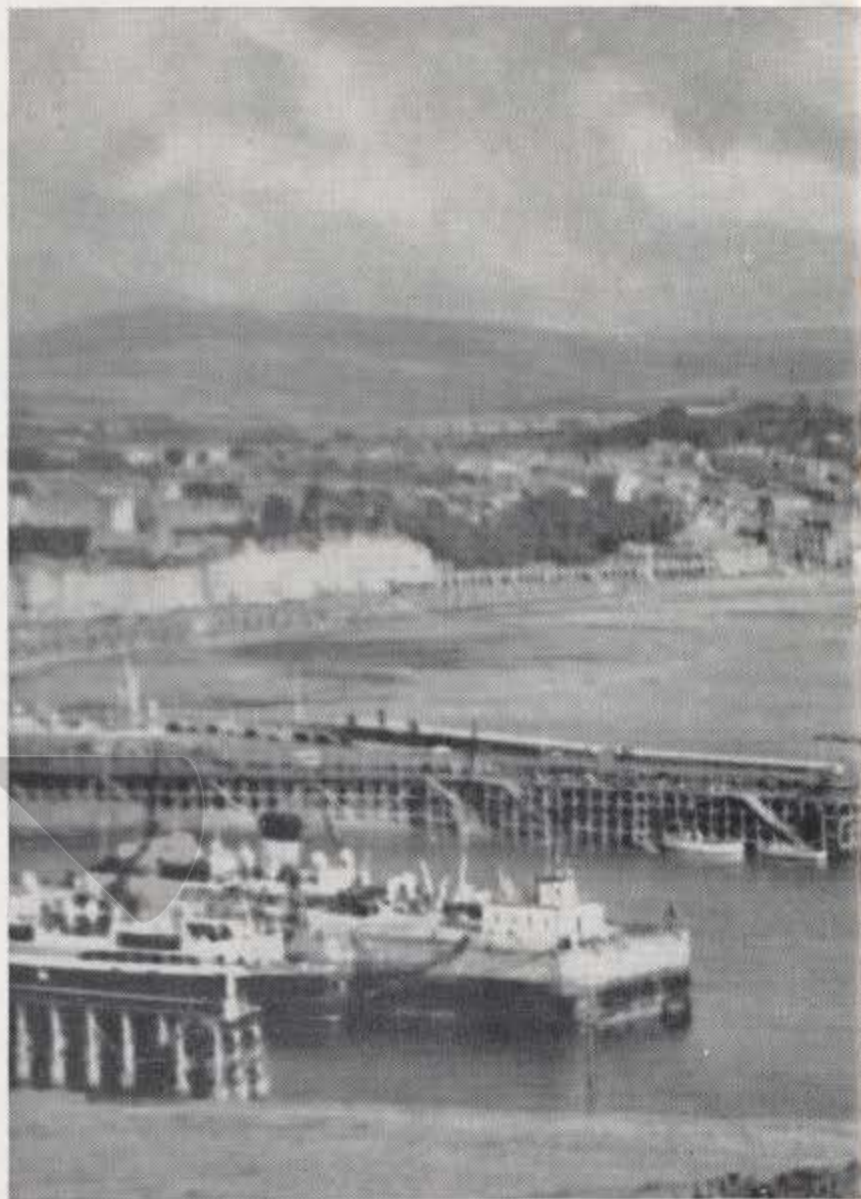


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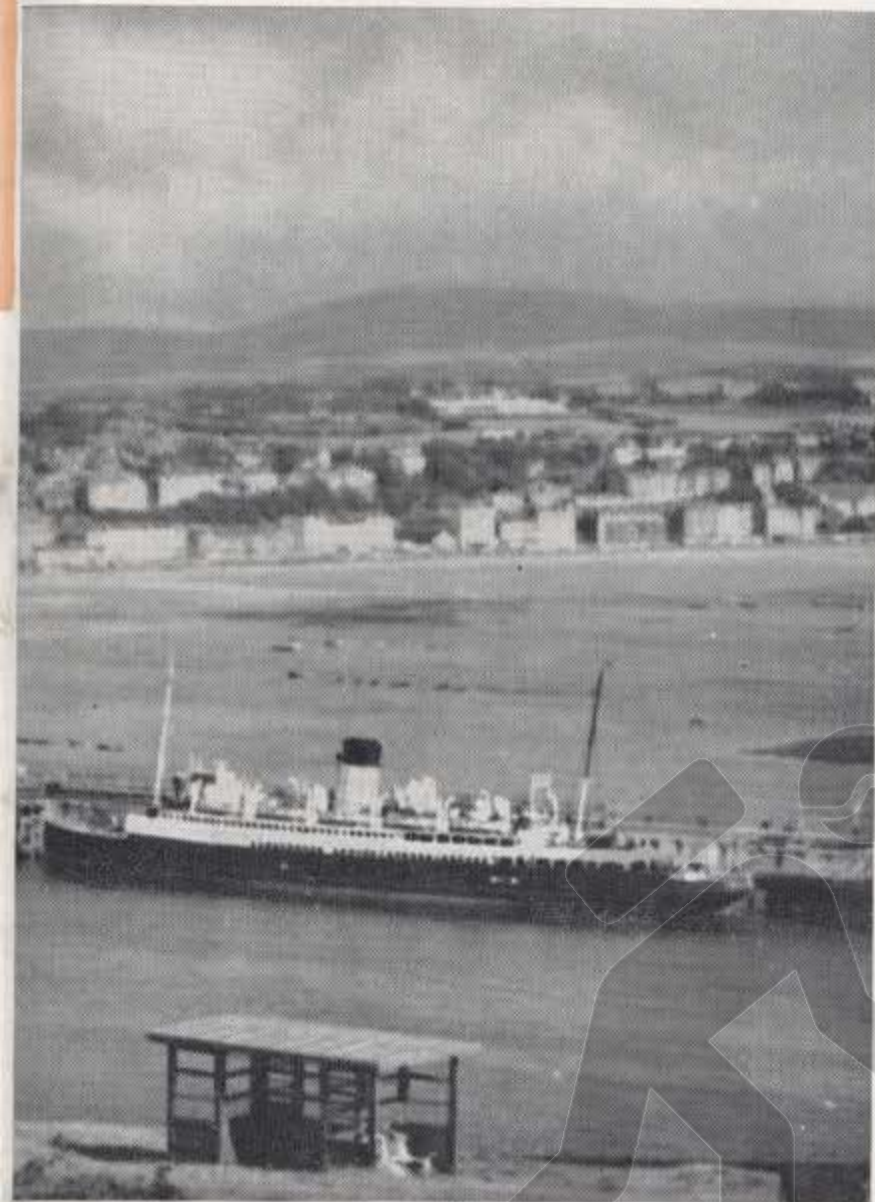
*Our 1957
Holiday Snapshots
Competition*

A GRATIFYING entry was received for the holiday snapshots competition and as can be seen on these and the following pages the subjects of the winning pictures are widely dispersed over the country. Pride of place in this picture gallery goes, of course, to the winner of the first prize—a view of Douglas, Isle of Man, and its harbour sent in by Dewi P. Williams, a young Oakeley quarryman. All the more credit goes to Dewi for his effort because he processes his own films and prints.



FOR the winner of the second prize we go from the seaside to the country—and a happy haymaking scene (below, left) at Ffestiniog. This photograph was submitted by Griffith Williams, Oakeley, who is to be seen on the extreme left.





Five other holiday pictures earned consolation prizes, and they are reproduced overleaf.

Third prize is awarded to J. E. Roberts, Votty, for the pleasing picture of the Menai Straits, with racing yachts in full sail against the wooded background of the Anglesey shore



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Two London scenes gained consolation prizes — Tower Bridge, by Peter Owen, Oakeley, and a Thames-side view (right) by Henry Parry, Oakeley.



The action picture of the seagull snatching a tit-bit was taken on the Colwyn Bay pier by J. E. Roberts, winner of the third prize.

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It was with a 25-year-old box camera that Dennis Roberts, Votty Office, won a prize with this floral commemoration in Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, of Aston Villa's 1957 cup victory. And, right, a happy picture of youngsters on the sands at Trearddur Bay, Anglesey, captured by John Williams, Votty.



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NEWS EXCHANGE

Votty's new under-manager

JOHN Richard Hughes, who joined the Votty quarry about two years ago was recently made an under-manager there. Starting his working life as a farm hand, he took up quarrying at



Ffestiniog 36 years ago and, as a rock-man, gained considerable experience underground. This was put to a use different from quarrying for a period of five years when he was employed by the Admiralty on a special job in south-west Wales, in which mining was involved.

RESOUNDING SEND-OFF!

JOHN Barlow was married at the Maenofferen Chapel on November 23rd to Miss Cit Parry, daughter of Mrs. Parry and the late Mr. Thomas Parry, of Maenofferen, Blaenau Ffestiniog. John is son of Ffestiniog quarryman



Mr. Aneurin Owen is on the right and Mr. Emrys Williams opposite

First time down

SHORTLY after his appointment as general secretary of the North Wales Quarrymen's Union, Mr. Aneurin Owen, of Caernarvon, welcomed the opportunity afforded to him to visit the underground workings of the Oakeley Quarry. A quarryman himself before his union appointment, Mr. Owen was accustomed to surface workings and Oakeley gave him his first experience of a slate mine. He was accompanied by Mr. Emrys Williams, the union's local organiser, who once worked at Oakeley. Their guide on the underground tour was Mr. Gwilym Humphreys, the Oakeley manager.

Mr. David Barlow, and Mrs. Barlow. His colleagues at Oakeley gave him a characteristic send-off—a salvo of rock cannon fired at Oakeley as he and his bride left the chapel. The greeting was heard many miles away!

His first salmon



GRASSING the first salmon is the proudest moment in any angler's life, and here is John D. Barlow, Oakeley clerk, with his first—a 12-pounder caught in the Dwyryd with a blue-and-silver devon during an August spate. The biggest fish John Barlow has ever caught, it was also the only salmon taken out of the river on that particular day. Having fished for trout since he was a boy, John Barlow went out for bigger game two years ago. His first season was a blank, but last season he accounted for a fish of 11½ lbs. as well as the one pictured.

Wedding



Eric Thomas, an Oakeley slate-maker, and his bride, formerly Miss Kate E. Roberts, after their wedding at Bethel Chapel, Ffestiniog.



UNDERGROUND AT OAKELEY — From page 9

With a steel tool and a hammer, the slatemaker taps gently along the top edge of the slate, until it splits cleanly lengthways into two. He then deals with one of these pieces and divides it again and again, until he is getting pieces less than a quarter of an inch thick, which actually bend as he eases them apart. The tool he uses is a beautiful hand-made object, flat and triangular shaped, finely tapered and strong, with one apex elongated into a handle.

The other man takes each slate and trims it in a constantly turning cutting-machine, with measurements marked in notches at one side. With four unerring movements, he rapidly trims off the four sides of the slate and then leans it against the wall in its appropriate size-group. There are many of these stacks of slates

to be seen leaning against the walls, each size being known by its own special name—queen, duchess, countess, and so on.

How simple and straightforward the system is when compared with so many of the complicated processes of manufacture in the twentieth century! Factories are impersonal, monotonous, mechanised, the work is done piecemeal, but here in the quarry, the progress of each piece of slate can be followed from the rock face to its place among its fellows leaning against the wall outside. Much of the work is done by hand, but long experience, extraordinary skill and knack take away any sense of drudgery.

My impression of slate quarrying is that it is a real job, and it's a good life.



CAFWYD eisteddfod hwyliog a llwyddiannus yng Nghaban y "K" o gwmpas y Nadolig. Y beirniaid oeddynt Arthur W. Evans (canu) a John Roberts (adrodd). Dyma'r ennillwyr:

Prif unawd: 1, James Parry; 2, Evan Roberts. Unawd (dros 50 oed): 1, James Parry; 2, Edward Edwards. Deuawd: Robert Jones a Evan Roberts. Prif adroddiad: Evan Roberts a William Edwards (cyfartal). Limerick, John Wood Ellis. Stori fer, Thomas Young. Taro sgwrs, Richard Jones a Huw Morris Jones. Triawd, parti William Edwards. Canu carol, James Parry. Côr, Caban yr "N".

Llywydd y pwyllgor oedd Llewelyn Hughes, gyda Evan Roberts yn ysgrifennydd gweithgar.

YM MHONC GOEDAN

Dathlwyd yr ŵyl yng Nghaban Bonc Goedan trwy gynnal cyfres o gyfarfodydd. Cafwyd "orig" dan ofal y Parch. Elias Hughes, ficer Eglwys Dewi Sant; anerchiadau ar y Nadolig gan Evan R. Jones a Ben Ellis Jones, a charol a chân ar yr "ukelele" gan Austin Lewis; itemau gan Phil Owen (saxophone) ac Eric Owen Jones (guitar); Mr. Wilfred Davies, Plas y Bryn, gyda'r "tape recorder", ac anerchiad gan y Parch William Williams, gweinidog Eglwys Seion (B.).

Ar ddydd Llun cyn y Nadolig daeth tri o blant perthynol i aelodau o'r caban

DATHLU'R Mewn Llen

i'r chwarel gyda "taxi" i'n diddori, sef Glenys Lloyd Jones, Mai Roberts a Dyfed Williams. Mwynhawyd y cyfarfod hwn yn arbennig.

80 YMGEISWYR AM Y GADAIR

Y dydd canlynol canwyd carolau a chafwyd beirniadaeth ar y llinell goll gan Mr. Huw Gwilym Jones. O'r 80 o ymgeiswyr dyfarnodd "Gwylt Walia" yn fuddugol. Atebodd Gwilym Roberts i'r ffug enw a chyflwynwyd y gadair a'r wobr iddo. Dyma'r pennill:

*Fe lwyddodd Rwsia i wneud y tric,
Trwy anfon i'r gwagle ddwy Sputnik:
Beth ar hyn ddaw i ragori?
Llais o'r nef—a'r byd yn sobri.*

Diolchwyd i'r cyfeillion oddiallan i'r caban a fu mor garedig a rhoddi eu gwasanaeth, ac i'r plant, hefyd i Arthur Glyn Jones am wneud cadair i'r bardd



Gwilym Roberts ennillydd y gadair

NADOLIG a Chân

Christmas at Oakeley

CHRISTMAS was celebrated at Oakeley in the time-honoured way with the literary and musical mid-day meetings at Bon Goedan and "K" Floor cabanau recorded in Welsh in these pages. The arresting poster for the Bonc Goedan eisteddfod, which we picture, was drawn in red and green by Edgar Daniels, and the chair for the successful poet was made by slate-maker Arthur Glyn Jones. The chair was won by Gwilym Roberts, and the silver cup (pictured with the poster) was awarded to James Parry, winner of the chief solo competition.

buddugol, a swyddogion y chwarel am bob hwylustod.

Llywyddwyd y cyfarfodydd gan Richard Jones, a'r trefnwyr oedd David Griffith Owen ac Austin Lewis.



James Parry, prif unawdwr



BACK COVER PICTURE

TROUT FISHING AT OAKELEY

ANGLER in the cover picture is Joseph Thomas, staking his claim to the privilege granted to our retired quarrymen to fish in Llyn Ffridd, which is part of Oakeley Quarry territory. Joseph Thomas retired in October after slate-making at Oakeley for thirteen years. Fond of music, he has the distinction of being one of the founder members of the Oakeley Male Voice Choir. It was he and Gwilym Williams, of Dolwyddelan, who rallied the singing talent in Bonc Shafft caban to enliven the mid-day break, and from that group of singers sprang the choir which is so popular to-day everywhere they go. Their conductor is Mr. T. O. Thomas, a brother of Joseph Thomas, whose chief musical interest now is the precentorship of Tabernacle Welsh Presbyterian Church, Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Starting his working life as a quarryman, Joseph Thomas left Ffestiniog to become a coal miner in South Wales. He served with the Royal Field Artillery in the first world war and after the Armistice went back to the pits, later to return to his native town where he married and resumed slate quarrying. A keen fly-fisherman, Joseph Thomas makes his own flies and does well with them in local lakes. One of his best catches came from Llyn Manod—nine fine trout, averaging three-quarters of a pound apiece.



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Llyn Ffridd and the Oakeley Quarry

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