

CABAN

JULY, 1957



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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 : A view of the lovely lake which lies on the Tanybwllch estate to the north of the "Plas." The road from Maentwrog to Rhyd runs alongside the lake which is known locally as Llyn Mair.*
- *Below : Youthful visitors to Oakeley (See News Exchange)*



MINISTER FOR WELSH AFFAIRS AT OAKELEY



Mr. Brooke admires an ornamental slate fan — a souvenir of his visit presented to him by Mr. Cutts

BORROWING time from a very full programme during his five-day tour of Wales last April in his capacity as Minister for Welsh Affairs, Mr. Henry Brooke, the Minister of Housing

and Local Government, spent nearly two hours at our Oakeley quarry and evinced the keenest interest in what he saw.

In fact, the Minister, who afterwards confessed that he had been



chamber working and of extracting slate from the mass than had been possible during his rapid inspection of two chambers on Q Floor, about 900 ft. underground.

He wished to know how a new chamber was started, how a 6 ft layer of slate was cut from the whole face of a chamber, and how the rock to be extracted was separated from the pillars which are secured as supports for the floor above.

Incline stop at Q Floor junction
fascinated by the experience, stayed some twenty minutes longer than his time-schedule allowed, and many of those minutes were spent in an earnest discussion on the techniques of slate "mining" with Mr. Gwilym Humphreys, the Oakley manager, over a cup of tea in the office.

The Minister obviously did not want to go away without a clearer understanding of the methods of

points Mr. Humphreys explained to the Minister with the aid of quickly drawn diagrams.

Such interest was typical of the persistence with which the Minister delved into many aspects of Welsh life and industry in the course of his general tour, the purpose of which was to acquire a first-hand knowledge of Wales, its people and problems, to enable him the better to discharge his

In Q 9, Thomas Ellis Jones explains to the Minister the methods of cutting slate from the mass by channel drilling and splitting.



Mr. Brooke operates a drill—used in this instance for making a pilaring hole in a slate block preparatory to its despatch to the surface. The rockmen in the picture—taken in Q 6—are Robert Goronwy Hughes and Arthur Williams.



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A cordial handshake for Thomas Ellis Jones as Mr. Brooke leaves Q 9. With Thomas Ellis Jones is his rockman partner, Gwynfor Jones.



responsibilities as Minister for Welsh Affairs.

The Minister, who was met at Oakeley by our Mr. Harry Cutts, was accompanied by Mr. F. Blaise Gillie, Under-Secretary of the Welsh Office of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government; Mr. H. N. Jerman, assistant secretary at the Welsh Office; Mr. Sylvester Evans, the Minister's private secretary; Mr. Geraint Walters, Director for Wales of the Ministry of Works; Mr. A. P. G. Brown, chief information officer of the Ministry of Housing and

Local Government, and Mr. Herbert Davies, of the Welsh department of the Central Office of Information.

On his arrival the Minister was joined by Councillor O. W. Roberts, chairman of the Ffestiniog Urban Council, and Mr. D. O. Jones, the clerk, and Mr. D. W. Jones-Williams, clerk of the Merionethshire County Council.

Under the guidance of Mr. Cutts and Mr. Humphreys the party went underground by way of the K balance lift and two

inclines to Q Floor, which is not far from the bottom of the mine.

For the journey the Minister wore the regulation helmet, rubber boots and a borrowed raincoat. He was greatly interested in the

In Bonc Goedan mill, Mr. Brooke tries his hand at slate-splitting watched by slate-maker Arthur Glyn Jones. On the extreme right is Mr. Blaise Gillie. Slate dressing was demonstrated for the visitors by Evan R. Jones, who is a member of the Ffestiniog Council.





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Out of the mine into the sunshine—the party ascending to DE Floor by way of the K balance.

activities of the rockmen, one of whom, Thomas Ellis Jones, in Q 9, told him with evident pride, while splitting a block of slate: "These are the best slates in the world—without a doubt. The trouble with them is that they last too long!"

Our pictures tell the story of the Minister's tour of the quarry.

Appreciation

Interviewed for *Caban* before he left, Mr. Brooke said: "I had seen photographs of the underground workings, but I never could picture what it was really like, so it was an entirely new experience for me".

One thing that struck him, he remarked, was the excellence of the air underground, which was "far better than normally experienced in a coal mine". And the Minister added: "I have always heard it said that in a slate mill the air was full of dust, but it seems to me that the extractors keep the air wonderfully pure".

In a comment on the future of the slate industry the Minister observed that the chief difficulty seemed to be in getting new entrants. Shortage of apprentices was the principal bottleneck.

Before he left to meet the chairman and members of the urban council at Blaenau Ffestiniog and representatives of other local authorities, Mr. Brooke said he was grateful to everybody who had helped to make his visit to Oakeley a very pleasant one.

His appreciation was further expressed in a personal letter he wrote to Mr. Cutts after the con-



clusion of his tour of Wales. We are pleased to be able to quote the following extract:

"For me and for all my party who had not been underground in a slate quarry before, it was a fascinating experience, and I gained some understanding of the resourcefulness and craftsmanship which, I am sure, are the secrets of the successful development of the slate industry over the years."

"I greatly hope that the Company and all who work in it may prosper, and that increasing numbers of men may find employment in the industry."

"I particularly want to thank you for the beautifully fashioned slate fan which will be a memento in my family for many years of my visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog."



In this photograph, taken outside the quarry offices before the visitors left, are (from left) Mr. A. P. G. Brown, Mr. F. Blaise Gillie, Mr. Henry Brooke, Mr. H. Cutts, Mr. Gwilym Humphreys, Mr. Geraint Walters, Mr. Sylvester Evans, Mr. D. O. Jones, clerk of the Ffestiniog Council; Superintendent G. W. Roberts, deputy Chief Constable of Gwynedd; Mr. Herbert Davies, Mr. D. W. Jones-Williams, clerk of the Merionethshire County Council; Councillor O. W. Roberts, chairman of the Ffestiniog Council, and Mr. H. N. Jerman.

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At the end of his visit the Minister has a few parting words with Mr. Cutts

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Talent amryddawn y Cabanau

I DDATHLU y Nadolig yng nghaban Bonc Coeden trefnwyd cyfres o gyfarfodydd amrywiol. Llywyddwyd gan Mr. Eric Thomas.

Agorwyd pob cyfarfod gydag emyn. Cafwyd anerchiad gan Mr. John Gwilym Morris yn y cyfarfod cyntaf ddydd Llun, Rhagfyr 17, ac fel y rhai a anerchodd yn ddiweddarach ymdrin a wnaeth ac agwedd o wyl y Geni. Gorffennwyd gydag emynau a charolau.

Dydd Mawrth cafwyd carol gan Mr. William Lloyd Jones, ac yna anerchiad gan Mr. Evan R. Jones. I orffen canwyd dwy emyn ddewiswyd gan aelod o'r caban.

Bu peth newid ddydd Mercher pryd y cafwyd detholiad ar y corn bariton gan Mr. Anarawd Jones. Chwareuodd ddau ddarn, sef "Intermezzo" allan o'r opera "Cavalleria Rusticana", a charol. Dilynwyd gyda charol a chan ysgafn gan Mr. Austin Lewis i gyfeiliant ukelele-banjo.

Adroddiad, "Simon, fab Jonah" (I. D. Hooson) gan Mr. Joseph Thomas oedd yreitem gyntaf dydd Iau, ac yna rhoddodd y gŵr gwadd, Mr. James Parry, garol a chan werin. Can wedyn gan Mr. Ivor G. Jones a chydganu i orffen.

Dydd Gwener cafwyd nifer o eitemau. Dechreuodd Mr. Evan R. Jones gyda charol, ac yna adroddiad gan Mr. Robert Thomas. Carol eto gan Mr. Cyril Hughes a Mr. Ben Ellis Jones yn ei ddilyn gydag anerchiad. Wedi cael can o amser y diwygiad gan Mr. Robert Thomas, cydganwyd emyn i ddiweddu.

Yn cydfynd â'r cyfarfodydd yr oedd cystadleuaeth llinell goll. Dyma'r pennill, o waith Mr. H. G. Jones, oedd i'w gorffen :

Am i Nasser hawlio'r gamlas
Fe wnaeth Ffrainc a Phrydain lanas :
Beth fydd adwaith y dyfodol ?

Derbyniwyd dros gant o linellau i'w beirniadu. Yr oedd y brwdfrydedd yn uchel ddydd Llun, yn y cyfarfod olaf. Gorymdeithiodd yr "archdderwydd" a'r prif feirdd yn urddasol yn ei gwisgoedd amryliw ar draws y bonc i'r caban, ac yno, wedi i Mr. Huw G. Jones, y beirniad, ddyfarnu y wobr i Mr. Evan R. Jones, o dan y ffug-enw "Hen Gorff", aed trwy y seremoni o gadeirio y bardd buddugol.

Cyfarchwyd y bardd gan Trebor o'r Maen (Mr. Robert Thomas), a chanwyd can y cadeirio gan Mr. Ben E. Jones (Eos y Spens). Haedda chwareuwr y corn gwlad, Mr. Iorwerth Jones, glod arbenig. Dyma'r llinell fuddugol :

"Mynwent fras fydd gan y diafol".

Derbyniwyd yr adroddiad hwn oddiwrth Austin Lewis a'r canlynol oddiwrth James Parry.

Yng nghaban Lefal Galed cafwyd rhaglen o "Bawb yn ei dro". Yr arweinydd oedd Wyndham Jones.

Stori fer. Beirniad, James Lewis ; ennillydd, John Arthur Jones.

Drama fer. Beirniad, Owen Evans ; ennillydd, Wyndham Jones a Vincent Jones.

Gwybodaeth gyffredinol. Holwr, Edgar Daniels ; ennillydd, Tom Roberts.

"Spelling bee". Beirniad, Edgar Daniels ; ennillydd, William S. Evans.

Llinell goll. Beirniad, James Parry ; ennillydd, Owen Evans.

Dyma'r pennill :

Pe ennillwn fil o bunnau
Awn am flwyddyn ar fy ngwyliau :
Pe cawn filiwn at eu gwario
Prynwn long, a mynd i forio.

PIPING WATER THROUGH BOMB CASES

ONE might never have guessed that the pipeline shown here, which looks rather like a hefty trunk water main, was constructed of discarded war material. Running some 240ft. along the top of the mountain above the Votty quarry it is, in fact, built up of several cluster H.E. bomb cases recovered from a scrap merchant's yard.

Its purpose is simple; it replaces an old wooden trough which no longer fulfilled its function of containing a stray stream and preventing its water from seeping through the mountain into the mine.

The bomb-case pipeline, 17 inches in diameter, carries the stream efficiently—and inexpensively—into the main open culvert which runs down the mountainside and drains away much of the water which would otherwise find its way into the underground galleries.

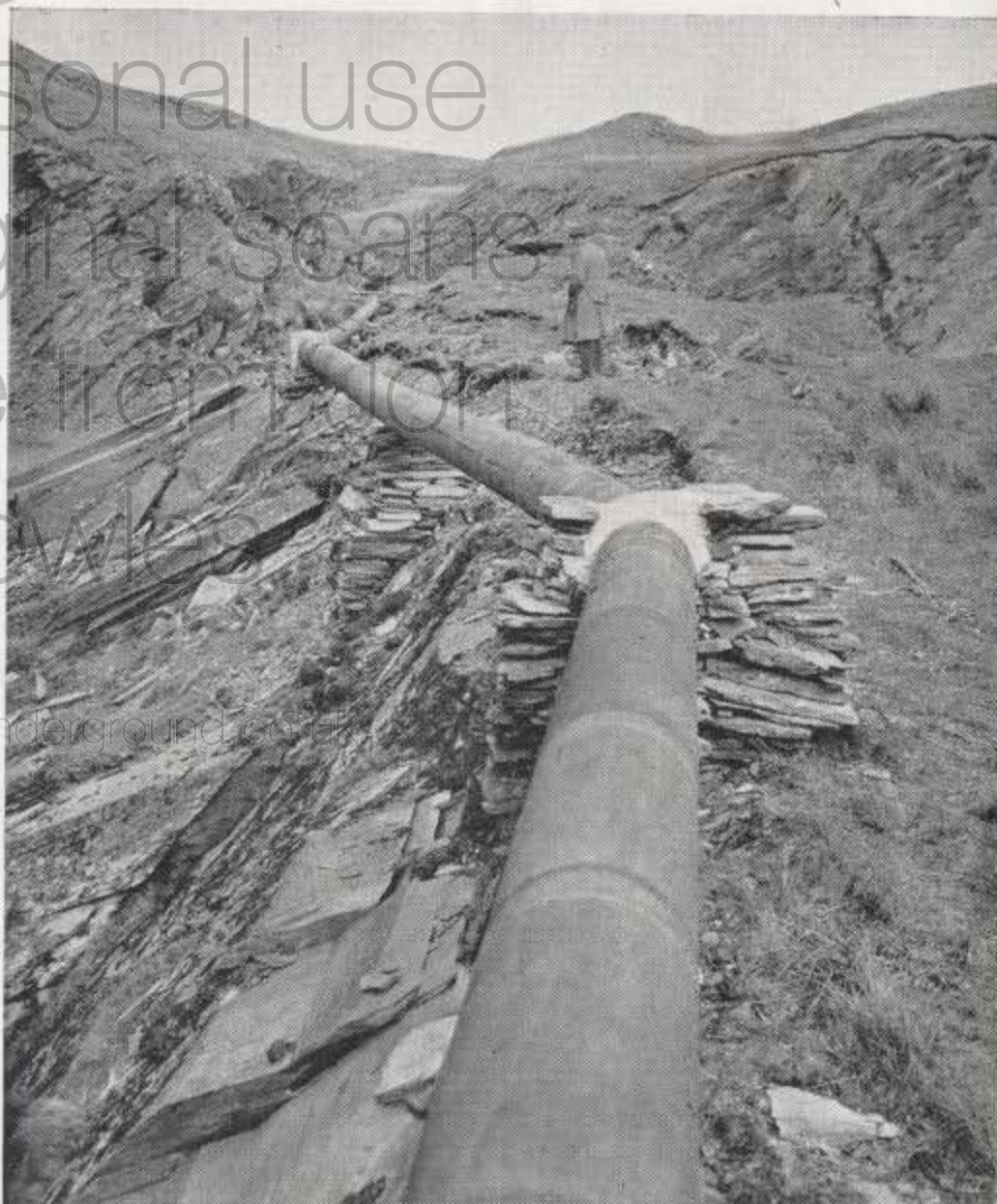
Mr. Emlyn Jones, the Votty manager, thought the troublesome stream would be better controlled if it were enclosed, and Votty officials hit on the idea of utilising the bomb-cases for the job when they learned of their existence in the scrap yard.

Plain steel cylinders, 3ft. 8ins. long, the cases were bought already electrically welded into short lengths. These were man-handled up the mountain, about 1,500 ft. above the Votty Mill level, together with the necessary tools and equipment, which included small cylinders of oxygen and

acetylene specially supplied by British Oxygen Co. for easier transportation.

On the mountain a small group of men, working under the supervision of Tom Evans, the Votty engineer, welded the lengths of casings together, rolled them into position on the line of the ruined trough and built up the pipeline seen in our picture.

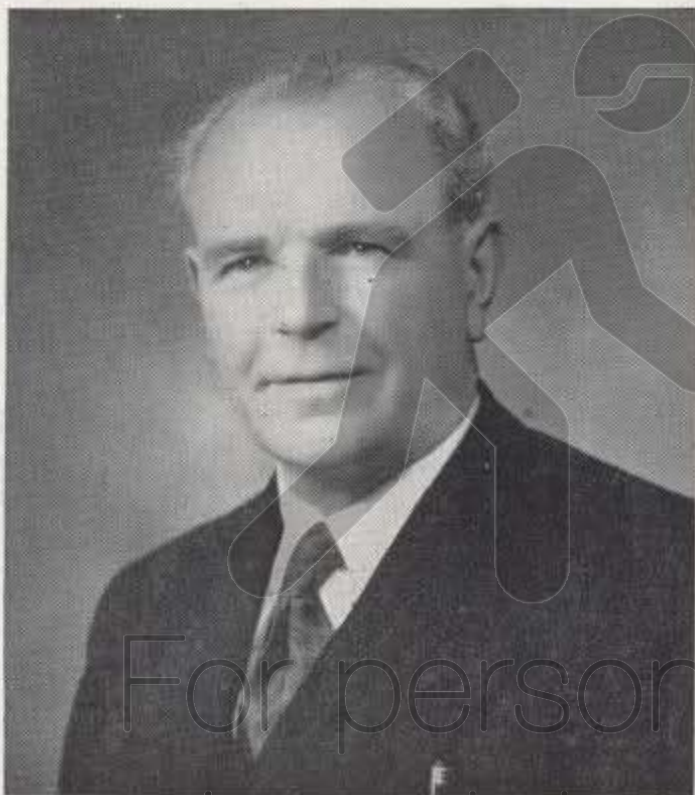
This ingenious piece of improvisation might aptly be described as an example of turning swords into ploughshares. The bomb-case pipeline is assuredly an improvement which has the added advantage that it will not be affected by the winter snow that used to block the old wooden trough and cause it to overflow when the thaw came.



Retirement of Mr. C. G. Dobson

Mr. C. G. Dobson, of Messrs. Hall & Co., Ltd., well-known for so many years in the "roofing" world, is retiring.

Well-known as is his intense interest in everything to do with roofs, however, we wonder how many people realise the enormous amount of work done by Mr. Dobson on behalf of the National



Pitched Roofing Council, particularly in organizing the competitions for students of the numerous Architectural Schools and Colleges that took advantage of the Council's activities. Their success was undoubtedly very largely due to his efforts.

We have this very much in mind, as well as our very long and happy business connections, in adding our voice to the many that will be wishing him the very best of health and enjoyment in his retirement.

Studies in expression

HUMOUR in one form or another enlivens the quarryman's working day and to their innate sense of fun may be attributed the sign which distinguishes the caban on Votty's L Floor and leads the pictures in the opposite page of the men who gather there for the mid-day break. Their rock-girt "hotel" is located in the deepest of the Votty levels—457 ft. below the surface!

Our cameraman's snapshots are of:

First row: J. M. Williams, Roderick Roberts and Robert Jones.

Second row: Gordon Davies, J. Harker Jones, W. R. Edwards and Handel Roberts.

Third row: William Jones, George Breckon, John Evans and O. G. Hughes.

Fourth row: Owen Evans, W. Harker Jones, Bob Morgan and Owen E. Jones.

CABAN L, VOTTY



Oakeley Choir at St. Helens

OUR picture shows the Oakeley Male Voice Choir, wearing their new blazers and badges, on the stage of the Congregational Hall, St. Helens, Lancashire, when they entertained the St. Helens Welsh Society on the occasion of their St. David's Day celebrations. The warm welcome extended to the choir was acknowledged by Mr. Dennis Roberts, their vice-chairman, and at the end of the evening the Mayor of St. Helens, Councillor P. Lowe, personally thanked the conductor, Mr. T. Owen Thomas.



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Modern school below ancient castle

THE ancient and the modern is strikingly illustrated in our picture of Ysgol Ardudwy, Harlech, which is sited at the foot of the rock on which stands the castle built by Edward I.

Costing £167,000, and designed to provide secondary grammar and modern education for 540 pupils in Ardudwy—the area between the Mawddach and Traeth Bach—the school was formally opened in June by Lord Hailsham, the Minister of Education.

The architects were Richards and Trollope, F. & L.R.I.B.A., of London,

to whom we are indebted for these brief notes of this new school of the Merionethshire Education Authority. The architects say: "The exterior was designed to be in harmony with the famous castle at whose foot it is built and so as not to be too obtrusive on the exceptional scenic views from the castle. To this end, and also to employ local materials and industry as much as possible, amongst other items, the roofs were slated with Oakeley slates with very pleasing results".

The county architect is Mr. Norman L. Jones, L.R.I.B.A.

“My visit to the Oakeley Quarry”

This essay is contributed by 15 year-old schoolboy T. Oliver Jones, who is in Form 4A of Ysgol Eifionydd, Portmadoc. He lives at 5 Eryri Terrace, Portmadoc.

ON Thursday, June 6, I had the privilege of being one of the twelve boys from Eifionydd School, Portmadoc, to visit the Oakeley Quarry. As I walked from the bus to the path leading up the mountain, the surroundings which caught my sight first of all were the great rubble heaps on either side. These caused me to think back to, or rather imagine, the work and years it had taken for man to quarry so much slate and rock.

“Astonishing”

Reaching the offices we were supplied with a helpful guide who was to bestow much astonishing information upon us. We were given lamps and led to the shaft where we were lowered to level K. I could not help but feel rather proud of the fact that I was being lowered into the greatest underground quarry in the world; I shall never forget the experience.

My thoughts vanished when our truck reached the level, for I looked around at the great walls of solid rock, the gleam of the sunshine pouring down the shaft from the surface and the cheerful, kind faces of the men who greeted us with jokes and puns.

But our visit, being a short one, was not to be concentrated on the happy atmosphere created by the men. Our guide ushered us along the electric-lit tunnel alive with the whirr of loaded trucks making their way to the sunlight, their cargo a load of rock which had been buried for millions of years.

We were taken into a chamber, where we heard rather than saw two men working at the slate-giving rock with their drills which, I was amazed to see, worked

with compressed air. The chamber was free of dust and had a silent, peaceful atmosphere about it when the drills ceased to work. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness of the chamber, I could make out the bare cold rock, and heavy chains hanging from the ceiling where previous pillars had been.

We moved to Level L. where we saw the great machines providing the drills with their inexhaustible energy. Such machinery, hundreds of feet under the surface of the earth, seemed quite a wonder. In a corner of the machine room was a stove and on the bench nearby a tin mug with the remains of a drink of tea. If these men were a thousand feet under the ground, I don't think we should miss seeing that tin mug!

Wooden beams supporting the tunnel in various parts also made one think of the work the men do to quarry this famous Ffestiniog slate. We were next led to see the underground lakes, which would be fatal to anyone falling in. They were so green and cold.

Changed Conditions

We were not to leave this great quarry without seeing the manufacture of the commercial slate which was very interesting to watch. One thought back to the days T. R. Hughes used to write about in such books as “Chwalfa”, and of how conditions have changed in favour of these hard working men.

I was indeed very sorry to leave this great quarry and its greater-still atmosphere of happiness amongst its workers. I would like to express my thanks to all who made my visit possible—and so interesting.

POWER FROM THE AIR GRID

IT would be an exaggeration to say that air under pressure is as vital to the quarryman as it is to the deep sea diver, but nevertheless great quantities of air are used in our quarries—as a form of power essential to the task of mining and working slate.

Air lines are as prolific as electricity cables; they run into the mills and the workshops, into the numerous chambers from which slate is extracted, and are carried into the furthestmost points of the extensive underground workings—following the miners and the rockmen as they penetrate still deeper into the core of the mountain.

Oakeley's compressed "air grid" comprises a number of electrically-driven compressors located at various points, thrusting air through many miles of pipes which form a vast network of air power. Scores of valves control its use and receivers at strategic points maintain ample pressure.

Compressed air is employed to operate a variety of machines, some of which are here illustrated. It is the motive power for all rock drills; for winches used for moving, lifting and loading heavy blocks of slate below and above ground; for operating mechanical loaders, a pneumatic hammer in the smithy, and for driving a few fans occasionally used in certain sections of the mine.



The compressor on DE. Floor, on which Richard Owen is doing a routine check, was installed in 1929. Driven by an electric motor, the fibre belt is 60 ft. long and was fitted seven years ago. It may be calculated that, running for eight hours each working day—as it usually does—the belt has travelled more than half-a-million miles! Richard Owen, who is 56, has been at Oakeley since 1948, but his principal function is that of lampman; he takes care of and issues the electric lamps used by the men underground. DE. Floor compressor needs only occasional attention.

An important application of air power is in dust suppression, the compressed air being utilised to work suction devices in all operations which tend to create dust, particularly in drilling underground, and thus the atmosphere is kept clean and free from any harmful irritant.

Oakeley's "air grid" is sustained by five compressors, three of which are located on the surface—at Middle Quarry and on C and DE Floors—and two underground on L and P Floors.



A remarkable machine is the "Eimco" loader. Air power drives it on rails, forward and in reverse, operates the scoop to bite at the rubble and raises the scoop in an overhead movement to tip its load into the "trailer" truck attached. It has an expert handler in Robert Jones, a native of Bethesda, who has been a rockman all his life. Now 64, he has worked at Oakeley for sixteen years and for some time has been using one of our pneumatic loaders—he calls it "yr hen greadur" (the old creature)—in a cavity on K Floor at the base of a rock-fall which occurred seventy years ago. From the rock-fall Robert Jones extracts first-rate blocks of "old vein". As he observed: "We get some lovely slate here". On the right of the picture is Robert Jones' rockman partner, John S. Jones (the "S" is included simply to identify him from the other Joneses) who is 66 and has worked at Oakeley for twenty years.

The largest of the compressors is to be found at the Middle Quarry. It is driven by a 200 h.p. electric motor and produces compressed air at the rate of 1,030 cubic feet per minute at a working pressure of 80 lbs. per square inch.

All the compressors are in operation at one time or another during the working day. The air vessels, which maintain a constant

2 cwt. "strike"

Air power gives the pneumatic hammer in the smithy, seen in the opposite page, a "strike" equivalent to a force of 2 cwts. Shaping a heavy bar of nearly white-hot metal with it are the two blacksmiths, Griffith Roberts, aged 47, and Iorwerth Jones, aged 55. Both started work at Oakeley about 30 years ago and they have been there ever since, although Griffith Roberts was away for six years serving with the Army from 1939-45.

IN THE SMITHY



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Whenever any extension of the "air grid" is required, or in the event of a fault, David Buckingham Jones is the man sent for. He is pictured fixing a slight leak in the air receiver which is directly connected to the DE. Floor compressor. His job is to maintain the air lines throughout the quarry, and he looks after the water-pipes as well. Now aged 50, David Buckingham Jones has worked at Oakeley since he left school. His leisure time and holiday interest is motor-cycling—his present machine is a Norton 600 combination—and he has toured many parts of the country. With him is his assistant, Glyn Evans. Aged 18, Glyn is an apprentice fitter and when he is not working on the air or water systems he tackles engineering repairs in the fitting shop. As a change from handling metal during the day he attends evening classes in wood-work.



Compressed air drives this fan at a speed of 3,000 to 4,000 revolutions per minute. Running at full pressure it is reminiscent of a fire siren! The fan is located at the entrance of a secondary tunnel and is used to exhaust smoke from the workings after blasting.

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Power from the Air Grid (continued)

and relatively uniform pressure in the "grid", are similar to large tanks and range in size from 8ft. 6ins. long and 2ft. 6ins. in diameter to one of 20ft. in length and 5ft. 9ins. in diameter.

On its journey through the pipes the compressed air, warm at the start, cools and condenses and the water accumulates in the vessels so that it is necessary to drain them daily.

A dual function of air power in the mine is illustrated in this picture of rock drilling by Robert Jones and John S. Jones. Air drives the drill and is also utilised to collect safely in the bag all the dust released during the drilling.



Party spirit recaptured in pictures

AS our previous issue was going to press at the time we were unable to include a report of the New Year parties for the children, but we give on the next pages pictures which recapture something of the cheery atmosphere of those festive events. More than 200 children whose fathers work at the Oakeley and Votty quarries were invited and 162 attended, too many for one sitting, and so there were two parties—on the first and second days of the year.

Mr. H. Cutts sent his good wishes in a telegram, which was read by Mr. Humphrey Lewis, and special guests included Mr. John Thomas, a retired Votty rock-

man, now over 80, who represented quarry pensioners. He and Mrs. Thomas, with Miss Olwen Jones, the Oakeley Club "queen", distributed gifts to the children.

Arrangements for the parties, which were at the Queen's Hotel, Blaenau Ffestiniog, were made by the Oakeley Club committee, and it was agreed by general consent that the festivities were highly successful.

Most of the children are pictured on the following page, the top photograph being taken at the first party and the other at the second.





Top left, Ann, aged 5, and Shirley Morgan, aged 7, daughters of the bandmaster of the Royal Oakeley Silver Band.

Top centre, The Evans sisters, Glesnie (10), Eleri (13) and Delyth (6). Their father is employed at Votty.

Top right, Making short work of a plate of cakes—7-year-olds Alfred Williams, Brian Lloyd Jones and Gareth Williams. Their fathers work at Oakeley.

Centre, left, Dennis Roberts, Votty clerk, shows how it might be done.

Centre, Mr. and Mrs. John Thomas, the special guests, cut the cake. Mr. Thomas is a former Votty rockman.

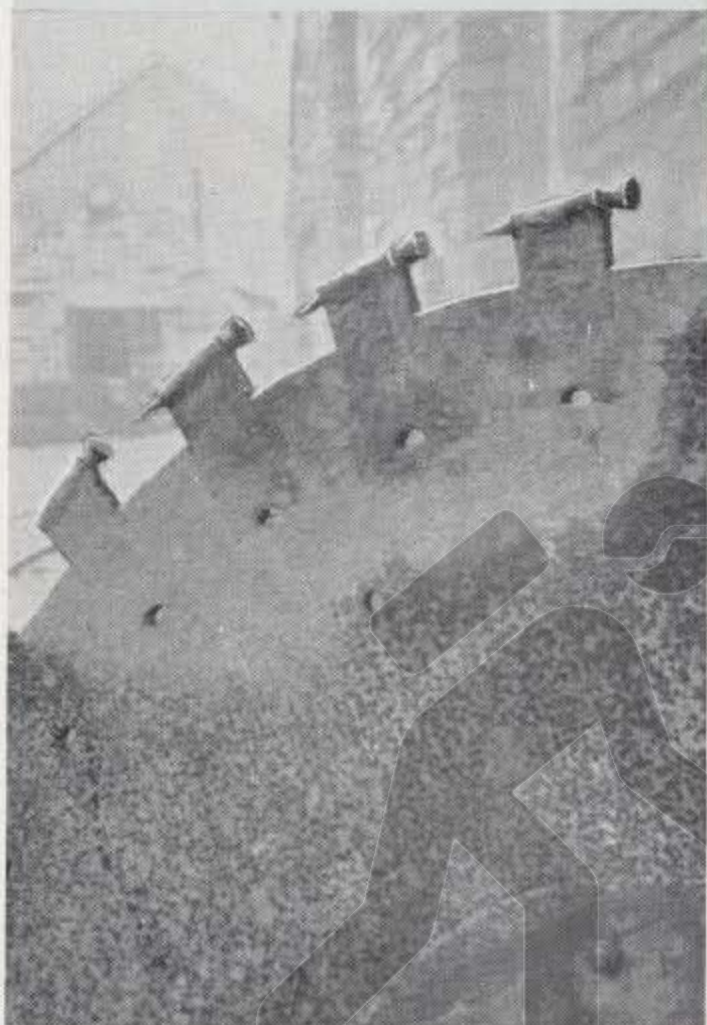
Centre, right, Happy youngsters—Rowena Lloyd Davies (8), Josephine Jones (5) and Caroline Jones (10).

Bottom, left, Two-year-old Patricia Hughes, one of the youngest, looks after herself.

Bottom, centre, Menna Jones (14), Jean Humphreys (13) and Carys Win Jones (13), whose fathers are at Oakeley.

Bottom, right, Billy Jones, aged 2, needed a little help towards the end of the party.

SLATE CUTTING TECHNIQUES



MARKS of the machine as illustrated in this page afford a striking example of the improvement that has taken place in slate-sawing technique. The upper picture of a piece of slate in the wall of one of the older buildings at Votty shows the coarse marks of the Hunter saw used about fifty years ago.

Pictured below is a block of slate cut by a diamond saw; the cut is so fine that our cameraman was able to catch the reflection of the operator, Selwyn Jones, on the freshly-cut water-washed surface of the block!

Yet the old and the new saws are not dissimilar in basic design, as our illustrations indicate. The Hunter saw—one of which remains a curious relic at Votty—has a cutting surface formed of rivets five-eighths of an inch in diameter, with hardened countersunk heads driven into segmented sockets round the periphery of the steel blade. The countersunk heads, revolving at a comparatively slow speed, formed the cutting edge. When worn these could be knocked out and replaced—a much less costly process than the maintenance of the precision diamond saw of today. But what a difference in speed and efficiency! The diamond impregnated cutting segments of the blades now in use revolve at a peripheral speed of about 7,500 feet per minute and cut through the hardest slate with remarkable rapidity.



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High Level Tipping



THE Moelwyn mountains and the seaboard of Merionethshire and South Caernarvonshire make a magnificent and familiar panoramic view for Robert Evans (right) and Frank Evans for they work in high places—on Votty's Tuxford Tip, 1,200 ft. above sea level, and the highest working point of the quarry. Theirs are the tiny figures in the picture on the right, as caught against the skyline by our camera from the Middle Mill level far below. Richard Evans, who is 52, has worked in the higher regions of Votty during most of his 30 years' service at the quarry. For

twenty years his duties took him among the hills to see that streams and water-courses were clear of obstructions, an essential routine in ensuring the efficiency of the drainage system. Robert Evans' chief interest outside his work is choral music. He is deputy conductor of the Oakeley Male Voice Choir and choir-master of St. David's Parish Church, Blaenau Ffestiniog. His workmate, Frank Evans, who is 37, is a comparative newcomer to Votty. He served with the army for six years from 1940 and spent over four years in the Far East taking part in the Burma Campaign and seeing quite a lot of jungle warfare.

"Twenty Questions" *club night*

SOME of the "brains" among our quarrymen and staff were put to the test at the Oakeley Club in March when an "Any Questions" session was held with Mr. David Hughes as question-master. Members of the panel were John Gwilym Morris and Evan R. Jones from Oakeley, and John Evan Roberts and Dennis Roberts from Votty. A general invitation to the quarrymen produced a variety of questions and the panel, who were required to deal with social and political subjects as well as local problems, acquitted themselves well. A mixed audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening which was, by general consent, one of the most instructive and educative held at the club. "Any Questions" will surely find a place in next winter's programme—by request!

Water—by inches

IN case we whose lives are so much centred on Blaenau Ffestiniog feel that we are hard done to by the weather, consider for a moment some of the world's rainfall records noted by UNESCO. The greatest rainfall over a year was 471.68 inches on a mountain at Kauai, Hawaiian Islands, but Cherapunji, India, holds the long-time record of 450 inches annually for 74 years! Compare these figures with Ffestiniog's highest—149.79 inches for the year 1954 as recorded by the gauge at the Middle Quarry, 1,100 ft. above sea level. Yet, on Crib Coch, one of the Snowdon group, in the same year, the rainfall totalled 227.5 inches, which is evidence enough that there are wetter places in North Wales than Ffestiniog. The UNESCO report mentions that the greatest rainfall during one hour or less occurred in the United States—a fall of 12 inches in 42 minutes at Holt, Missouri. The best—or worst—Ffestiniog could do was 10.77 inches in eight days, and that was last year.

News

Obituary

**MR. OWEN E. OWENS, Votty
under-manager**

IT is with deep regret that we record the death through a tragic accident at the Votty quarry on Good Friday of our staff member Mr. Owen E. Owens, of Dolwyddelan. Mr. Owens had served at Votty for eighteen years, earlier as a rockman and for the last five years as under-manager.



We salute the passing of a colleague whose exceptional ability, kind personality and sincerity made a lasting impression on all of us who worked with and under him. We shall always miss him.

E.J.

Exchange

Learning the craft

Oakeley Club Officers

SIR Charles Oakeley, [Bart., [was again elected chairman of the Oakeley Club at the annual meeting held in May. Mr. H. Cutts and Mr. Humphrey Lewis were re-elected vice-chairmen, Mr. George Woolford, treasurer, and Mr. Dennis Roberts, secretary. It was decided to hold an angling competition for club members at Llyn Fridd, Oakeley, the date to be decided, and arrangements for the children's sports were also discussed.

Holiday snaps

IF you have a camera and an eye for a picture you have the opportunity of winning a prize in our 1957 Holiday Snapshots competition. Photographs on any subject with a holiday flavour may be submitted, and there will be prizes for the best three. Entries should reach the Oakeley Office by September 27.

Young visitors from Yorkshire

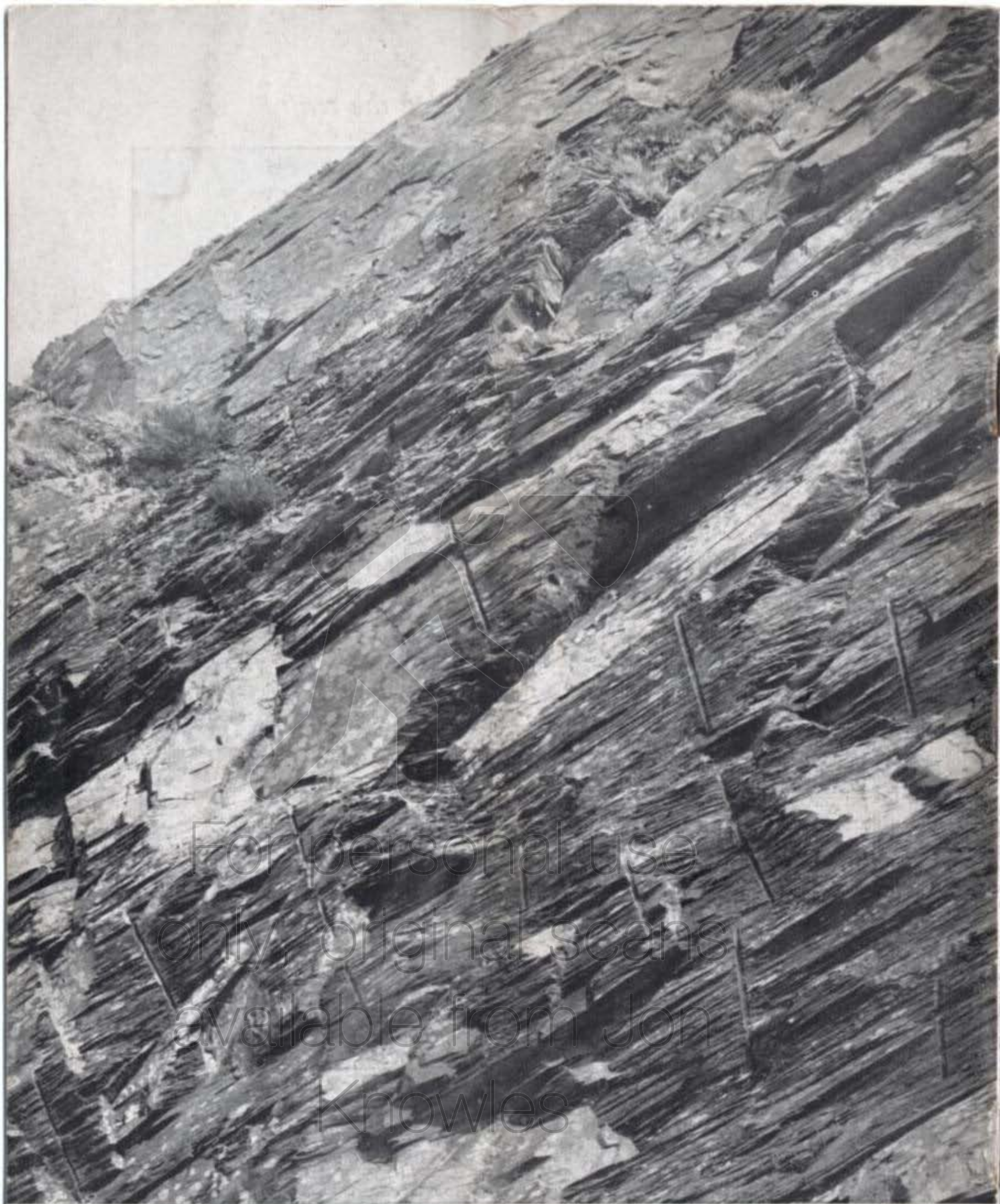
A party of eleven boys from second-day modern schools in Barnsley and Leeds were interested visitors to Oakeley. A view from a point near Spion Kop incline captured their attention as our cameraman photographed them. The boys were spending eight days "hostelling" in North Wales in charge of Mr. William Metcalfe, senior English master in the Intake County Secondary School, Leeds. (Pictured on page 2).



LEARNING the craft of slate-maker at Votty is Robert Cecil Shepherd, who entered the quarry as an apprentice straight from the Ffestiniog County School. He is the son of Robert Shepherd, a former Votty blacksmith. When asked what his hobby was, Robert replied: "Motor-cycling", and at the time he was photographed he was eagerly looking forward to his sixteenth birthday (in May) so that he could get a licence to ride the machine he had already acquired.

OUR BACK COVER PICTURE

Traces of the quarrymen's pursuit of slate on the mountainside a century or more ago, before he started burrowing underground, remain on the rock face pictured on our back cover. The rock rises from Votty's Tuxford level, 1,200 ft. above the sea, and the grooved marks on it are those left by pillaring holes made by quarrymen working with hand tools long before the pneumatic drill was invented. Open workings were abandoned many years ago.



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Century-old traces of the rockman's pursuit of slate.

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