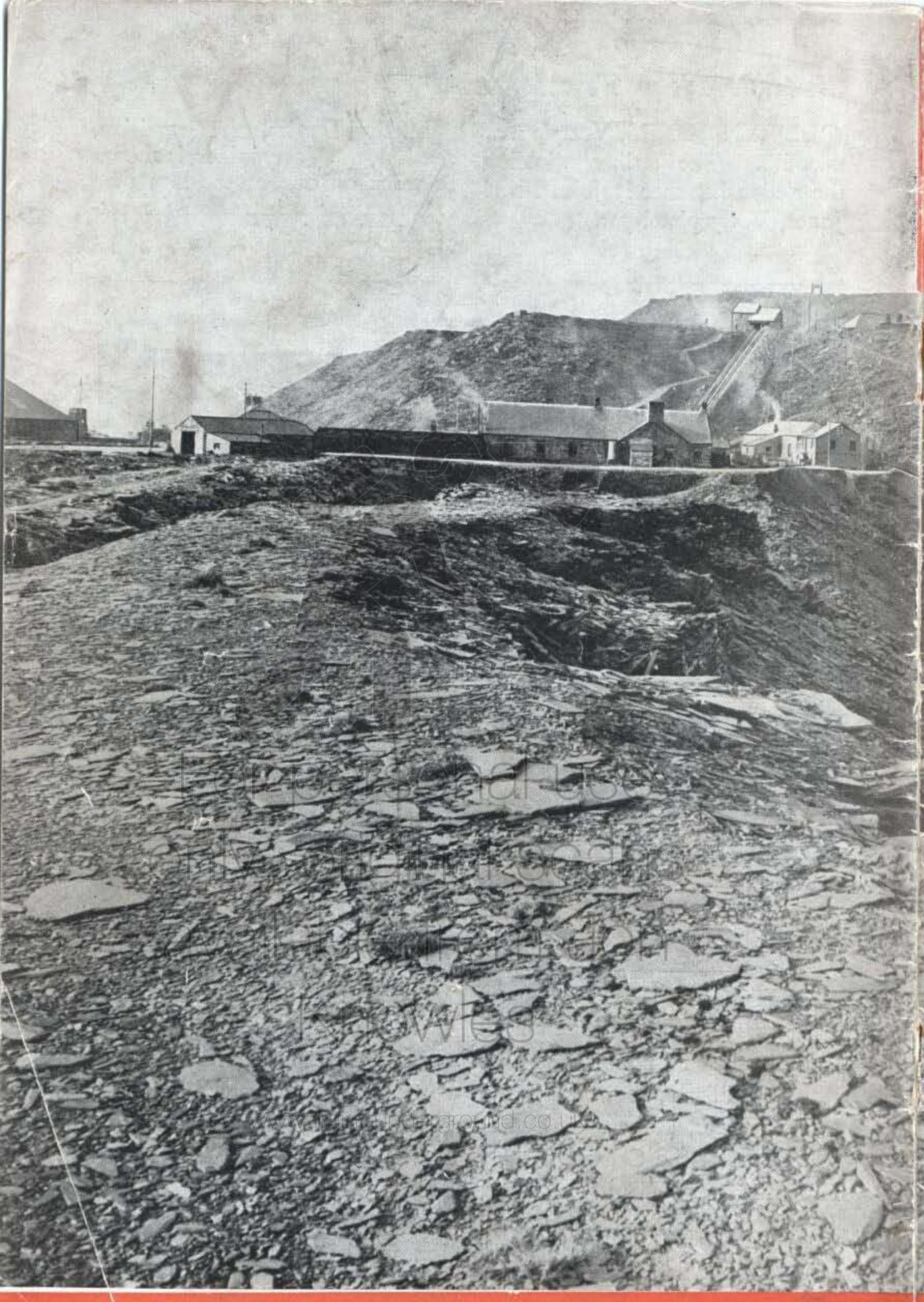
CABAN

NOVEMBER, 1954



CABAN is the magazine of the Oakeley Slate Quarries Co., Ltd., of 4 Old Mitre Court, London, E.C.4, and its associated company The Votty and Bowydd Slate Quarries Co., Ltd.

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE OAKELEY AND VOTTY SLATE QUARRIES

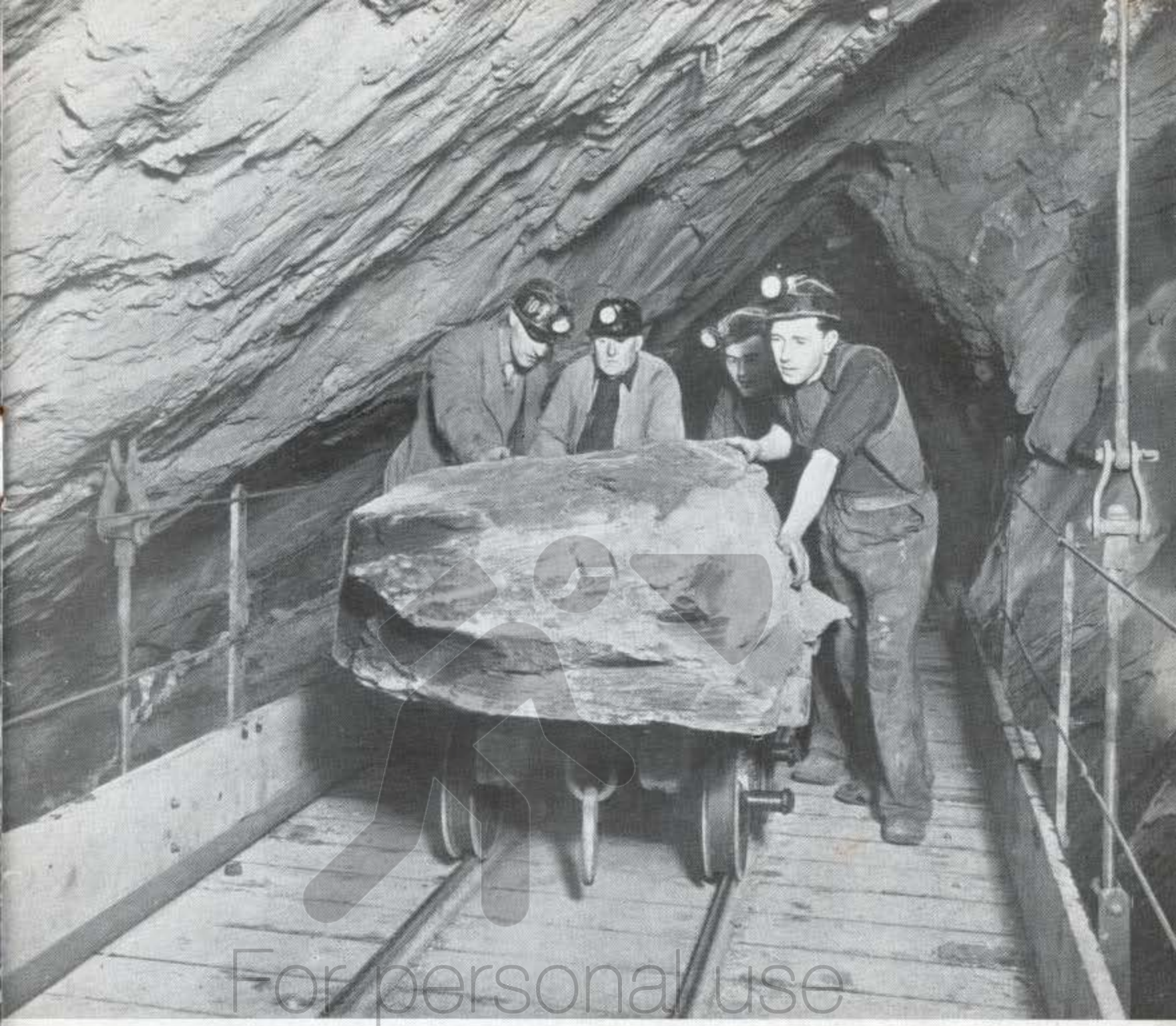
CABAN

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.

CONTENTS

"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 Page: Oakeley Panorama.*
- *Below: P floor caban (see News Exchange).*



Heavy duty viaduct, Oakeley

Floor to Floor: Nearing the bottom

IN KEEPING with the theme of our journey from floor to floor we resume the descent to the lower levels at Oakeley on the note of development. In our last issue was featured a photograph of the sturdy platform of a new bridge on O floor spanning a forty-foot gap over chamber P2 below—a heavy duty viaduct built to cater for new traffic from new development in the OB district of the mine.

The completed construction in use is illustrated at the head of this page and shows one of the first of a succession of large blocks of slate being rolled across the bridge. Resting on forty-foot steel girders, the foundations for which are seated in live rock rising at either end out of the dark chasm which is P2, the bridge is flanked by guard rails and footwalks. The structure is further supported by steel-rod tension stays secured by

bolts or pins wedged and anchored in the ingenious and positive manner characteristic of slate mining and devised here some eighty or more years ago.

Rolling the waggon with its two-ton load are rockmen Hugh Martin Hughes and R. D. Edwards assisted by labourers Eddie Crilly and Arthur Johnson. The bridge was erected by our own engineers.

On P Floor

Down in P floor one stage, or sixty feet below, the new bridge is seen in full perspective in picture on page 5. This view of P2 interior plainly shows the point and purpose of the new structure.

The view is forward to what remains of the rock face in the chamber and upwards where the bôn, or natural shoulder of rock normally marking the upper boundary of development in a particular chamber, has been worked through and away, thus giving access to the corresponding chamber, located, it might appear, one step upwards and further forward, as though on a giant staircase.

The new bridge, its four steel girders visible underneath, spans the space left by the rockmen after the removal of the bôn. A new potential of production is thus created and made accessible, enabling further development to proceed directly from the floor of P2 forward into the thickness of the floor of the chamber above.

Hidden Factors

Looked at in its rough-hewn condition, and dwarfed between the towering walls of the empty chamber, the potential of new slate is, indeed, a hidden factor. But in the neighbouring P1 chamber, where development of this kind is well advanced, the picture becomes clear. There, as our photograph (pages 6 and 7) shows, rockmen William Parry and Bleddyn Owen are seen actually at work on the bôn. The channelling machinists, clearly, have been there before, cutting an artificial foot-joint to facilitate the onward and upward thrust through the smooth face of rock.

In the foreground of the picture is a typical block of fine New Vein slate, one edge deeply scored by the channelling machine and already brought down, trucked and awaiting removal via the long haul to the mills 800 feet above the chamber.

Aneurin Hughes at the controls, O and R floors haulage incline

New bridge in perspective

The clean cut from the channelling machine is traceable along the foot of the rock face. The equally clean and neatly sliced edge of the thickness of slate, which the rockmen are contemplating, is characteristic of the skill and care taken in this specialised method of slate-winning.

The principle of "follow-through" development as a standard means of prolonging life and inducing greater productive yield of chambers lying "in step" and which otherwise might be deemed to have neared the end of their productive careers, was touched on in our last issue. The preparations, notably the preliminary upward thrust from the lower chamber—otherwise the roofing tunnel driven at the angle of the vein through the barrier of the bôn—was illustrated at the same time.

The picture of the mouth of the roofing tunnel emerging well inside the floor of OB.1 is reproduced on page 8 in juxtaposition with all that had gone before in PB.1 the corresponding chamber below.

. . . at work on the bôn

Follow-through—The start

The larger picture (page 9), taken close up to the bôn in the lower chamber, sets the scene at the beginning of follow-through development. On the right, against the massive chamber wall, the inclined roofing tunnel marks the line of approach to the upper floor.

Standing at the open base of the tunnel is Rockman Robert Williams, who, with his partner, will proceed in due time with the progressive widening of the tunnelled foothold, moving to the left across the thickness of rock, drilling, blasting and levering out raw material sufficient for many months of slate making by their

partners in the mills. In this way, and by the skilful application of the stepped-up widening operation hundreds of tons of good slate, forming the solid slate floor of the OB.1 will be won and brought down to the floor of PB.1. The floor of this chamber will thus advance in depth and in step with the steady progress of the rock-men.

The channeller and his multi-drill boring machine is readily recognisable. Serrations across the base of the rock, and again at intervals higher up, show that

"Follow-through" development—Roofing

some channelling cuts have been completed.

Owen H. Jones, the channeller, stands on the staging, while fitters Leslie Jones and Ellis Edwards make adjustments to the mechanical aid.

The way ahead here is literally cut and dried. Rockmen will take out slate from the line of channelling at a prescribed thickness, proceeding, where the roofing penetrates the bôn, to widen and work under the top layer of the bôn, leaving the undeveloped shoulder of rock linking the two walls of the chamber to serve as a natural bridge support for the traffic level on the floor above.

Advanced working

The full effect of the "follow-through" movement is given in the further illustration of advanced working in PB.2, and the smaller reproduction of the widening through to the floor of OB.2, illustrated on pages 10 and 11.

In the smaller picture, with Undermanager Morris Jones, is Rockman David Roberts, balanced on a chain at the extreme end of the widening from the roofing tunnel into the floor of OB.2. His chain reaches down under the bôn, along the slope of the vein, and on to the floor of PB.2.

The scene below the floor, in the larger picture, shows Richard Williams on the chain, and in company with Rockman Robert Hughes consulting on the next phase of their work.

The channellers have gone from PB.2, leaving their tell-tale imprint on the rock; the roofing tunnel is no more. The narrow, upward exploratory thrust through the bôn has been widened out of recognition, leaving only the sharply-angled and clean-cut edge of its earliest extremity. Development is seen in full action. Blocks have been taken from the channelled cuts and more will readily follow. PB.2 and OB.2 are fast becoming one unit. And so it will go on, widening and winning, until both chambers in time merge as one vast emptied cavern echoing no more to the rockman's drill.

"Plyg Mawr"

While there is nothing haphazard either in the preparation or execution of the work involved in this phase of development—decisions are based on experience of the "ground," backed by a host of careful calculations—the rockmans task is sometimes eased or supplemented by what he regards as an element of luck. Natural rifts in the rock tend to help and guide him.

Frequently geological eccentricities enable the rockman to size up and safely bring down outsize blocks of slate, some of them of

"Following through"—line of approach

Advanced working on the bôn

quite exceptional dimensions, like the one in PB.8 pictured on page 12.

Rockman Robert Jones, crowbar in hand, stands at one end of the "plyg mawr" which he and his partner David John Thomas have safely landed on the chamber floor. David John Thomas, who is a former R.A.F. welterweight boxer, described this one as "light heavyweight." Before *Caban* came along, he said the "plyg mawr" had already yielded up four blocks for the mills. He estimated that a further twelve "good blocks of slate" remained to be taken.

The approximate weight of the "plyg" is forty tons. The block was brought down from a lofty corner of the chamber. Another of similar dimensions was there for the taking. Robert Jones and his partner were confident that, given the required element of "luck," plus a little deft pursuasion by blasting, the second "plyg mawr" would soon be theirs.

The slate miners

The roofing tunnel has figured often in this description of the working scene underground. The men who carry out the all-important excavations are the slate miners, a skilled group, specialists in their field, and distinct from rockmen. The miners have been shown at work driving new floors, opening new chambers and pushing through traffic diversions. They also construct the wide steep shafts in which are installed wooden staircases to working places on the lower floors.

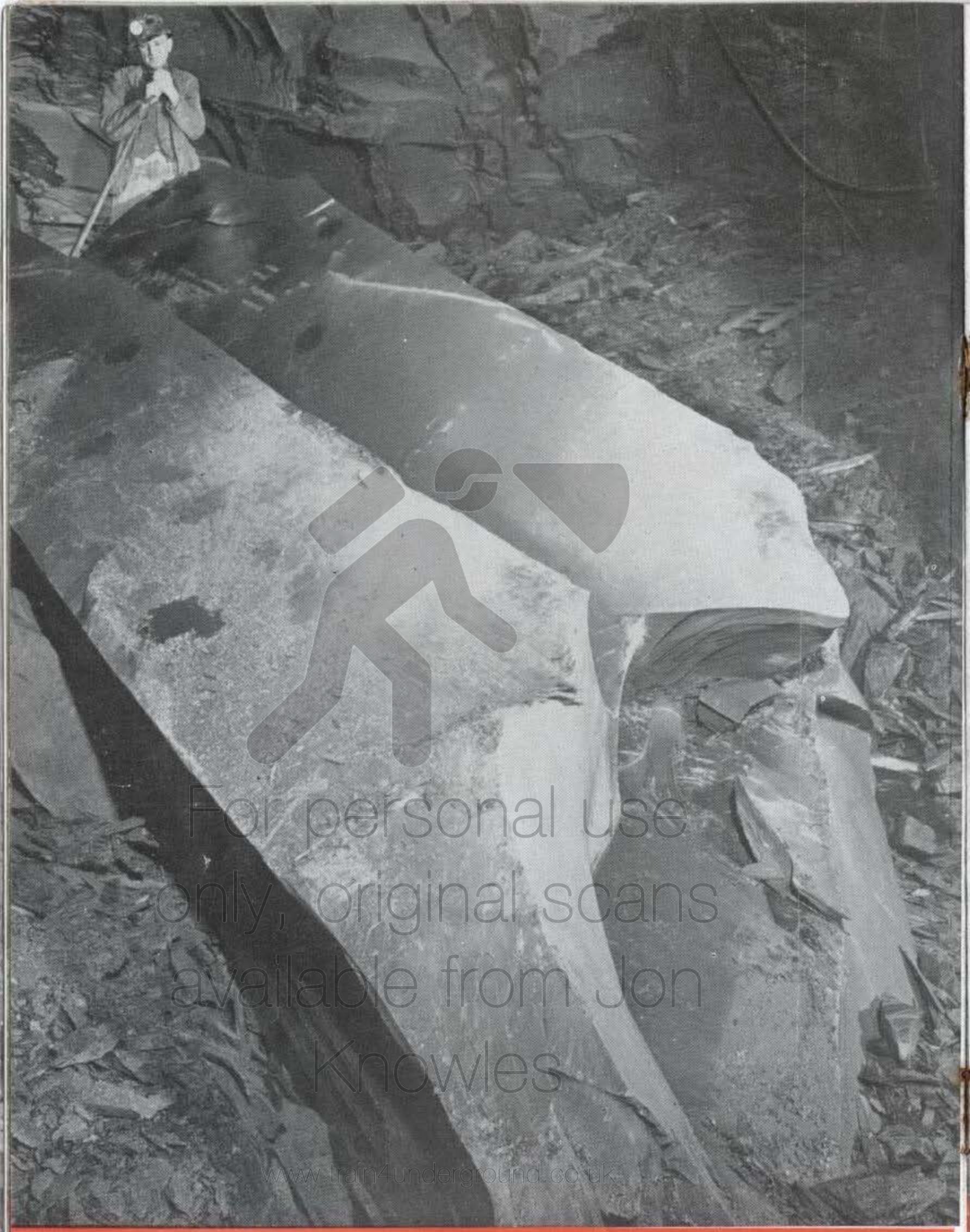
Built to withstand the wear and tear of the steel-spiked boots of men who daily clamber about the rock face, the staircases are known simply as "paths." A new path (see page 16) leading up through the solid rock from O to P, with Undermanager Morris Jones, on his rounds, ascending, is a typical example of the solidity of the structure and the skill of the Oakeley miner.

Course of duty

It has been mentioned that snags and difficulties encountered by rockmen are dealt with in the course of duty. There are exceptions, notably when faults are revealed in the formation of the rock necessitating reconsideration and adjustment of the planned progress.

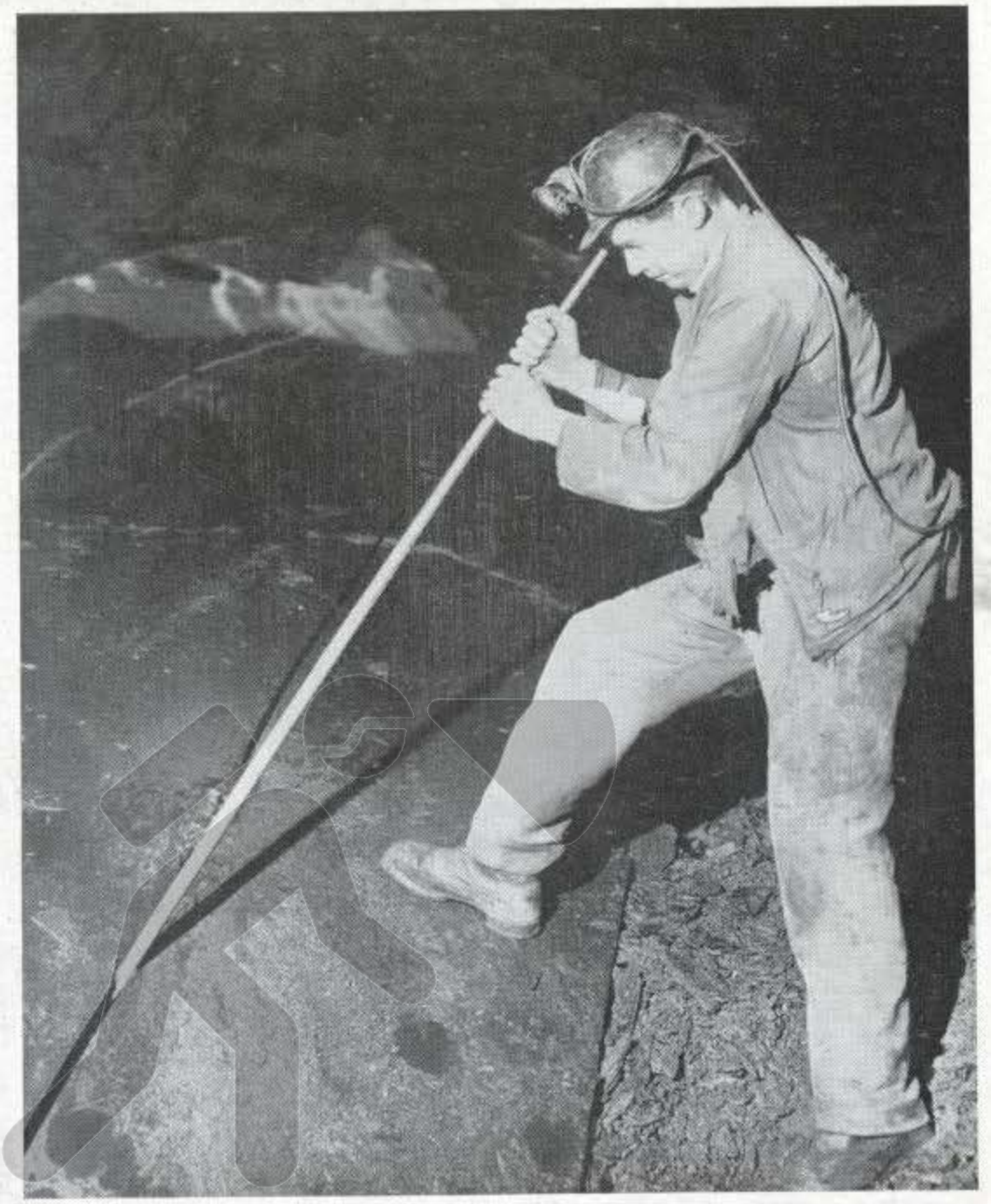
Usually a slight diversion from the surveyed route is all that is necessary to overcome the snag. Occasionally, the snag may prove

Widening OB.2 after the "follow-through"



Y Plyg Mawr

stubborn, requiring some exploratory probing, possibly in several directions, before what is sought is finally found and continuity of development re-established.



Ex-R.A.F. "welterweight" D. J. Thomas tackles a "heavyweight"

"Testing the ground"

The operation is known as "testing the ground," and miners are called in to do it. Also, on occasion, if the rock is "difficult" the operation may be protracted, even lasting several months before the safest and surest route to the new slate beyond is agreed.

In the far easterly district of P floor we show (page 17) miners J. R. Edwards and Richard Edwards actually engaged in a long-term stint of exploration. They are shown working under a patch of marble-like spar nearing the New Vein. Masked, and with the dust-extractor held at the business end of their machine, the miners are using a mechanical drill known in the mine as a "pusher." The legs of the tripod houses a hydraulic device which has the effect of taking the whole strain and weight of the drill off the arms and shoulders of the man guiding it. The power-driven "pusher" is capable of use in any direction and with equal facility, an advantage which is found particularly acceptable when, as in this instance, the work of excavation may be protracted and the rock diamond hard.

Marshalling traffic

P floor is one of the major producing units in the mine. The traffic levels and junctions are correspondingly imposing. All

Four-way Traffic Junction, C Floor, Oakeley.

New "path" from O floor, Oakeley

traffic from Q and R floors below —laden and empty—is raised on a separate incline to the P floor for marshalling and disposal via the main haulage system. Our picture on the middle pages show quadrupled lines of traffic converging near the exit from P floor. On the right are two traffic levels serving P floor proper. An empty waggon is being pushed into one level; a load of waste from P is halted in another. From the traffic landing behind the pillar on the left is seen

Miners with "pusher" drill, Oakeley

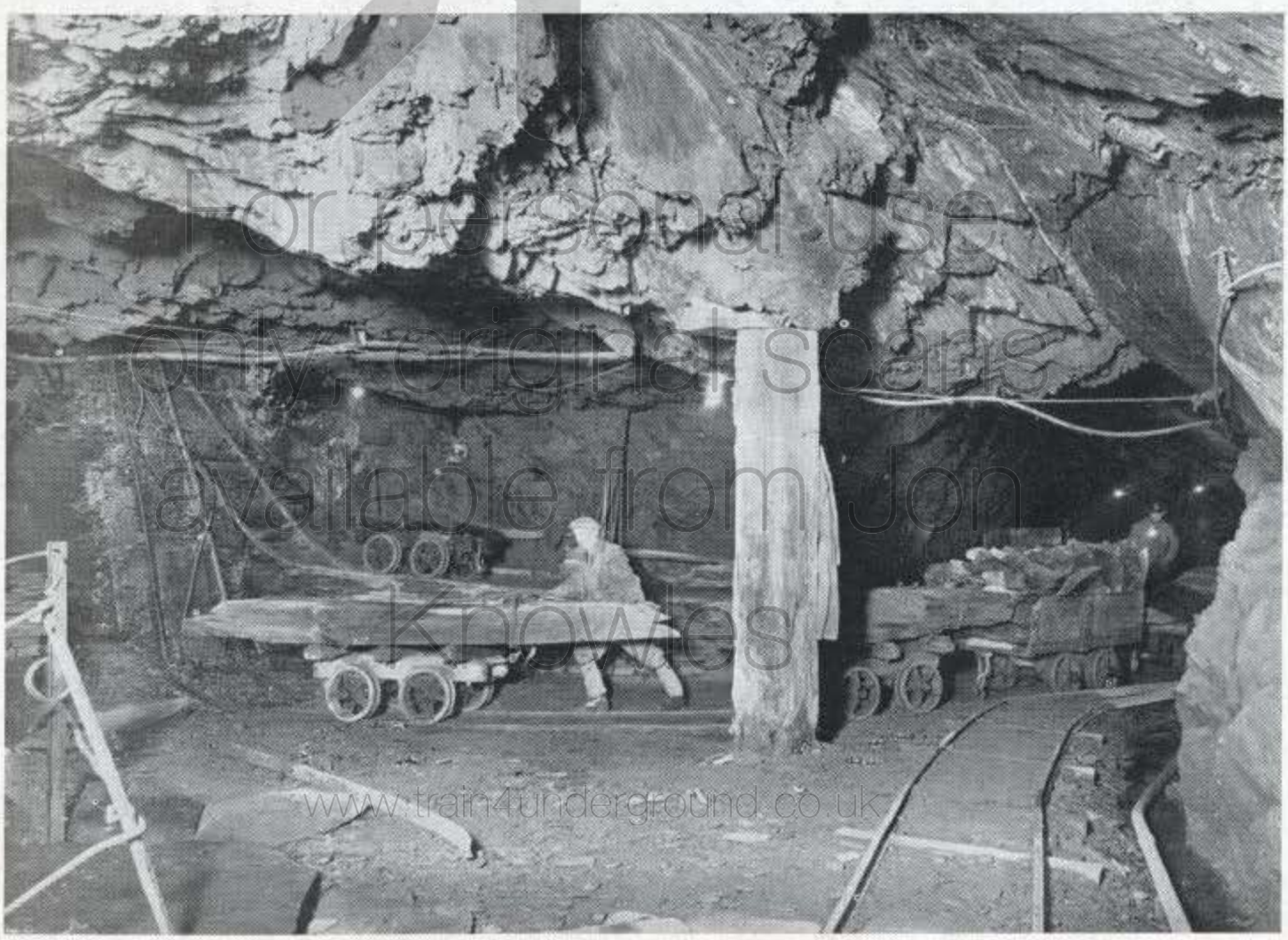
a block of slate newly arrived from the bottom floors. Also on the left, empty waggons for the rockmen on Q and R are being manoeuvred on to the traffic landing.

Behind the Pillar

The scene behind the pillar is continued in the picture on page 19 of the traffic landing from Q and R floors, the busy bottom levels of Oakeley mine. The unhooker waiting to take charge of the block about to be landed is Robert Davies.

The electric hauling gear is housed in a structure on the right where, at the controls, was Aneurin Hughes. The engine driver, whose duties also include charge and operation

T. J. Young, haulier and first aid man, Oakeley



Foot of Main incline to P, O and R floors, Oakeley

of the compressor furnishing compressed air power to the rockmen and others on the Q and R floors, is pictured on page 4 of this issue.

The final scene in the visit to P floor is the "business end"—the foot of the main traffic incline serving all three of the lower floors.

Unhooker John Williams is seen in the picture on page 18 marshalling a typical train of traffic in readiness for haulage to the surface of the Oakeley mine.

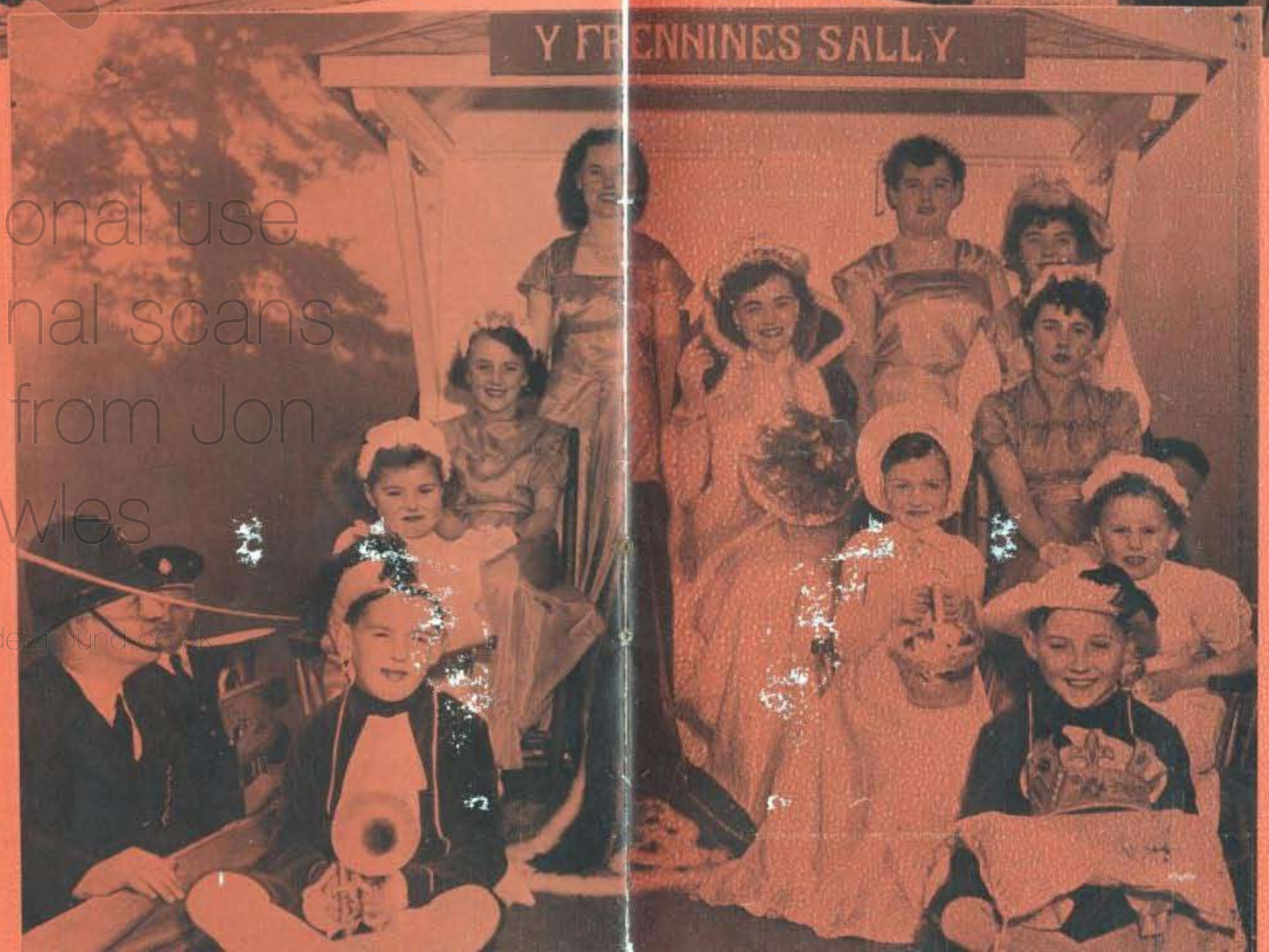
Safety Precautions

In this survey of the every-day scene at our mines the emphasis on security has been constantly stressed. The provision of expert exponents of first aid is one of the many safety precautions. On P floor Thomas J. Young (pictured on page 18 in his first aid clinic)

Haulage from O and R floors, Oakeley

Oakeley and Votty Club Quarry Queen

The scene in the Oakeley and Votty Club grounds at the crowning ceremony performed by Miss Betty Parry.



The Quarry Queen tableau with smiling Sally Jones and her Court pictured before the procession through Blaenau.

The carnival committee pay homage and receive the thanks of Queen Sally.

(See News Exchange for further pictures)

Holiday Snaps Contest

ALTHOUGH the summer scene was by no means conducive to happy holiday snaps our competition entrants were by no means daunted by the weather and here are the best in order of merit.

First: Horses in the show ring at Colwyn Bay show, entered by Peter T. Owens.

Second and third (equal), the elephant ride, entered by John G. Williams, and Riding the "White Horses," Morfa Bychan, entered by J. G. Hughes.

News Exchange

Queen Sally inspects her Guard of Honour

Y Frenhines Sally

ONE feature of the unlamented summer was that the rains held off just long enough to prepare and complete the Oakeley and Votty Club annual procession and coronation of the Club's new Quarry Queen, Miss Sally Jones, aged 17, second daughter of William Evan Jones and Mrs. Jones, of 2, Cambrian Terrace, Rhiw. The new Queen was elected by ballot.

The grace and charm of the Queen and her entourage were commented upon on all sides when, as is customary on the Club carnival day, they were conducted, with musical honours by the Royal Oakeley Silver Band on their drive in state through the town.

The guard of honour was composed of units of the St. John Ambulance and Nursing Cadets.

Crowning Ceremony

The crowning ceremony, presided over by Dennis Roberts (Club treasurer), took place in the Club grounds and was witnessed by a large attendance of club members, their wives, children and friends.

Sally was crowned Queen, and thus formally installed in office for the ensuing year, by Miss Betty Parry.

Gifts were presented to the Queen by each member of her court and by other well wishers.

Finally, on behalf of the Queen and the Club, gifts were presented to the members of the Court by Mrs. H. Jones. The acts of homage and the congratulations over, all present were treated to a

Margaret Jones, aged five, proffers a gift to the Quarry Queen

first class demonstration in first aid by the boy and girl cadets.

Queen Sally's court, seen in our display picture of the royal tableau, comprised: Rhiannon Jones, Brenda Morris, Glenys Hughes and (seated) Margaret Jones, Carys Wyn Jones, Glenda Wyn Roberts, Megan Jones, Laura May Jones, Bryn Jones (herald trumpeter) and Clifford Williams.

Members of the organising committee, pictured here receiving the thanks of the Quarry Queen at the conclusion of the ceremony are: Humphrey Lewis, Trevor Davies, Desmond Wyatt, R. C. Davies, D. Lewis, Richard Jones, Dennis Roberts, Mrs. H. M. Jones, Mrs. Dennis Roberts and Miss Mary Griffiths.

It is customary for the Quarry Queen carnival to be rounded off by athletic sports at the Dolawel field, but weather conditions necessitated postponement *sine die*. Better luck next summer!

Our Visitors

WHILE the Snowdonia National Park, though round about us, does not, strictly speaking, include us, there is no resisting the appeal which our Oakeley Quarries continue to make as one of the attractions on the sightseeing tour of the Park.

Inevitably during the summer months visitors succeed in breaking through our reserve—we are, of course, as busy in the summer as in all other seasons of the year—to make appointments to view the many features of our work on the surface and underground.

Young people, particularly, are fascinated by the skills of the men who win and make the slate.

The picture below of a group of boys from the Heathcote Secondary Modern School, Chingford, Essex, is typical of many such visits to the mine during the recent holiday months.

In this instance the boys are seen two floors underground giving the tools, equipment and a pillar of new slate in chamber L.B.F. the closest examination.

The boys were greatly impressed by their experience. Their chief surprise was the lofty airiness of the working place, and the immense bulk of the slate in the vein.

Slate rooftops now have a new significance for them which, we submit in all modesty, is as it should be.

FLOOR TO FLOOR

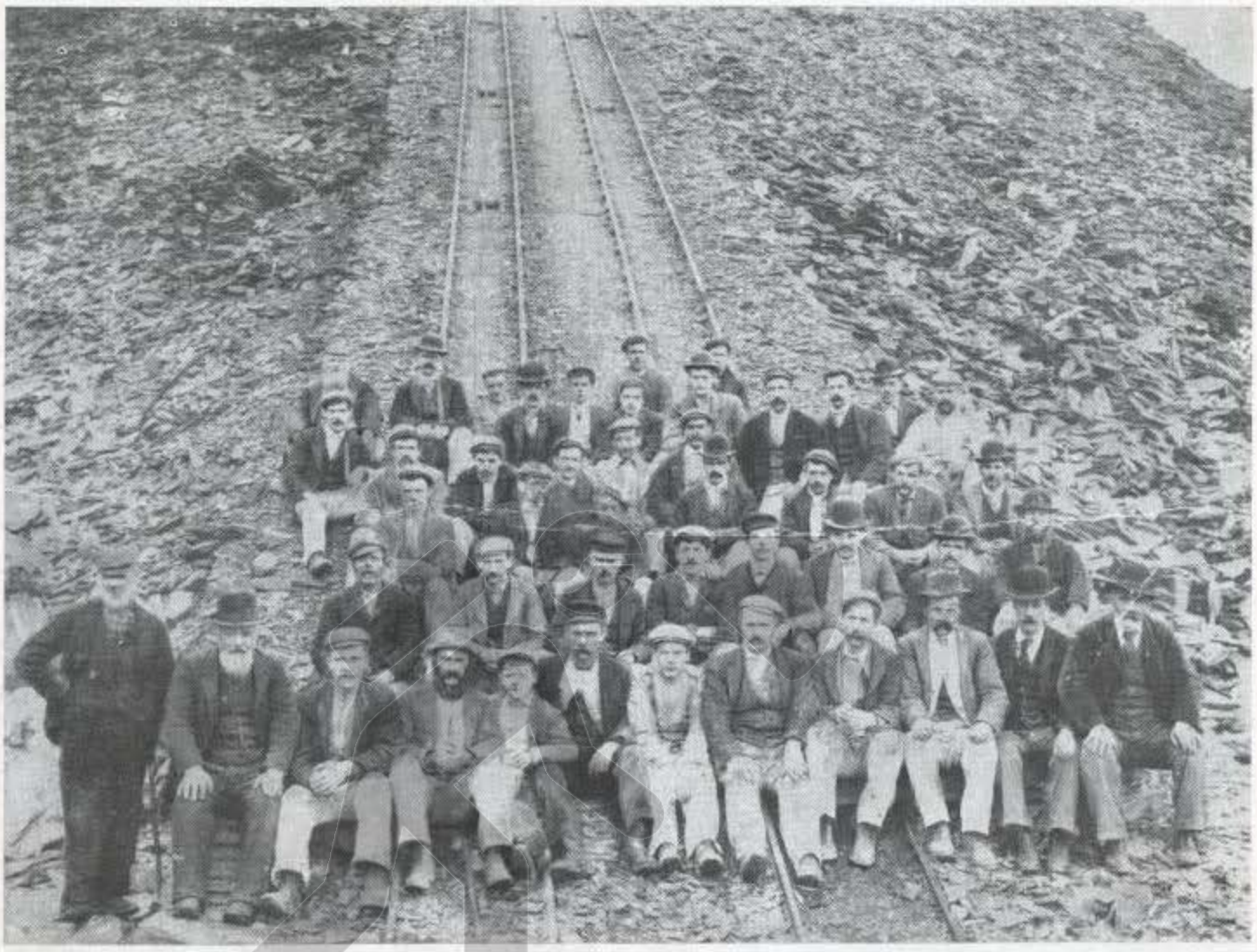
continued

combines his job as haulier with that of ambulance man. Thomas Young has twenty-three years' experience with the local St. John Ambulance Brigade as well as a wealth of war-time experience as a R.A.M.C. Staff Sergeant.

He joined the R.A.M.C. as a military hospital reservist and served throughout the duration of the war at several military hospitals in this country. His present field of activity as ambulance man covers P, Q and R floors.

Chingford boys down below at Oakeley

Glimpse of the past



FOR this interesting glimpse of an earlier generation at Oakeley we are indebted to Mr. Morris Jones, father of Morris Jones, Oakeley under manager. The identities, as far as can be recalled, and as supplied by Mr. Morris Jones, are as follows :—

Gth. Roberts, Roger —, Haulier, Bob Haulier, Robt. Roberts, Ed. Thomas, Rd. Edwards Bont, Joseph Jones, Bob Parry, Hen Ganon, Bob Humphreys, Dd. Morris, Ed. Evan Davies, Wm. Roberts, Hugh Jones, W. John (Band), Morris Pantllwyd, Wm. Lewis, Ed. Jones Ty Mawr, Gth Griffiths, Wm. Lloyd, Hugh Edwards Postman, Dd. Morris Traws, Elias Roberts Talwaenydd, James Davies, Thos. Davies Llan, Thomas Thomas, Evan Parry Traws, Dickson, John Gabriel, Hugh Rowlands, John Jones Traws, Cad. Jones Pantllwyd, Dd. Pierce Maentwrog, Owen Jones Hogwr, Rd. Roberts Slate Ins., Wm. Griffith Dolwyddelan, Dd. Walter Traws, Hugh Hen Law, Dd. Williams Driver, Richard Morris Traws, Manoah, John Hughes Griffin, Richard Roberts Penycefn, Dd. Jones Machine, John Pyrs Slate Ins.

Votty's New Tradesmen

SELWYN JONES, Votty's new smith. The striker wielding the sledge hammer is John Idwal Jones, Votty platelayer.

M. Eryl Davies, of Tanygrisiau, aged 21, the Votty joiner, is shown at work on one of the legs of a crane he has constructed for service in the mine.

Selwyn Jones, Smith at Votty and (right) J. I. Jones, Platelayer.

M. Eryl Davies, Votty Joiner.

CABAN "P" OAKELEY

(See picture, page 2)

PHOTOGRAPHED during a "scwrs" after the morning meal break in the "P" floor Caban are : Robert Williams, Iorwerth Jones, Robert Jones, Robert C. Davies (Chairman of the Caban), Meurig Humphreys, William R. Parry, John Reginald Edwards, Owen H. Jones, Thomas J. Young, Richard V. Williams, Richard Edwards, Isaac Morgan ("Father" of the Caban), George Woolford (Caban secretary and treasurer), John M. Richards, Robert G. Hughes, David John Thomas, Enoch Morris, Aneurin Hughes, Griffith Evans, John R. Roberts, Eric Jones and Jeffrey Osborne.

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