

CABAN

OCTOBER 1950



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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: High Level Bridge from Oakeley.

● Below: "K"-Balance entrance.

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Down at the Source of Things

A STUDY OF THE SLATE MINER

GRIMY slates, carefully handed down from the sagging roof of an old house in a crowded district of Liverpool were Ffestiniog slates. The street in which the old house stood bore a Welsh name, a memorial to the original Welsh builders. Some of the windows were bricked up, evidence, not of the blitz, but of the unenlightened days when daylight was taxed. The salvaged slates, thick and long, must have been 100 years old.

Neatly stacked near a busy boy apprentice were two-score of new slates, slim blue-grey, reminders of Ffestiniog, trim examples of a new generation of slate products from the depths of Oakeley. The new slates, carefully husbanded, were being held in reserve to supplement the older ones which, in these days of pressure on slate supplies, were essential to the repair of the roof.

We asked the boy whether he was aware of the actual source of the slates in his care. He answered brightly:

“Yes, me boss gets them down the South End of Liverpool.”

The Oakeley Scene

The actual source, the very beginning of things in the fascinating sequence of work and activity leading to the provision of that little stack of slates for the repair of a sagging roof in Liverpool is a story worth telling.

The South End, indeed! One must look for lofty, mist-covered Allt Fawr and for the Oakeley Slate Quarries, 1,000 feet up the mountainside. But, the beginning is not there where, it would appear, giants have carved footsteps to the sky. The tiers of man-made galleries meeting the eye from the edge of a great cavity which was the quarry are in disuse, save two. The open terraces, rising to 1,600 feet, bear stern testimony to 100 years of hard work and endeavour, winning slate to cover the roofs of numberless houses up and down this country and overseas.



A closer look from the floor of the quarry at the forbidding rocky massif rising there, sheer like a wall, and it is plain to see that the slate has now gone underground, disappearing at a sharp angle. We follow. Down through a great opening in the rock wall runs the K-Balance incline, the most important of the entrances to the Oakeley slate mine. The inclines passing through and down afford the swiftest route to our objective, which is the root of things.

To the Root of Things

From the warmth of a July noon we are plunged into the cool stillness of the depths, into the very vitals of the mountain. We follow the cleavage, or the angle of the vein, an acute angle, rushing past one floor after another, striking off at right angles to our precipitous descent.

At the Oakeley Quarries there are thirty floors. Thirteen of these, named in alphabetical order, are underground.

Leaving the incline at one of the floors to continue the descent by foot, we negotiate a zig-zag of steps and

Roofing for a Ceiling Bôn

ladders with a wire rope as handrail, down and down through a series of black caverns, the worked-out chambers of long ago, empty, echoing chasms flanked by the hard natural rock of the mountain which forms the supporting walls of the mine. It is thus we reach another floor.

Water hitting the bottom somewhere, a pump installation muttering in a side level gives hint of the nearness of the source of things.

Miners' First Task

It is down there, on "R" floor, the bottom-most working point in the mine, deep down under Allt Fawr and nearly 900 feet below the level of the quarry road, that we find the source of things, the latest example of the actual beginning of the process which produced the stack of slates for the boy apprentice in Liverpool.

Before rockmen, slatemakers or dressers can get to work there must be miners. The miner at Oakeley is the first man everywhere. Guided by expert surveys and his own experience he bores and blasts the route and prepares the places for the rockmen who follow, to come to actual grips with the slate.

To construct a new floor for the development of a series of new chambers in this great honeycomb of quarries-in-miniature located deep underground, the miner must first sink a passage from the last existing floor. Here again the angle of descent is governed by the slope of the vein which drives deeper and inward, always. To the insistent clatter of boring machines, driven by compressed air, and the noisy accompaniment of charges of gelignite, the miners, working in pairs, assault the hard rock for weeks on end, sinking and widening a route to the new floor.

Safety and Security

In the fullness of time, the miners drive a level at right angles to the inclined shaft. Their job now is the construction of the floor, and the opening of the first chamber, or cavity, in the vein for the winning of slate. In all this the miner

breathes by virtue of natural ventilation. The dust he puts down himself by means of a dust-trap and a fine water-spray played on the rock face and fed by a portable water-tank operated by compressed air.

Safety and security are the watchwords of the mine. Before the miner opens a new chamber the mine management must first consider support for the "honeycomb" above.

In the system adopted the mountain itself affords this support naturally. Perpendicular walls of rock are left in parallel lines forty feet wide, and thirty to forty feet between wall and wall, to support each succeeding floor, the chambers, from which the slate is worked, descending in parallel formation between them. Normally there is no necessity for artificial shoring up, no pit-props or girders. The miner makes full provision for the supporting wall by leaving an appropriate distance between each chamber. The foundation for the wall, or pillar, is, of course, the limitless depths of the mountain.

"Roofing" and "Widening"

On floor "R" miners had allowed for the wall and were engaged in the all-essential preliminary to preparing a new chamber—roofing, a task far removed from that followed by our friend the slater in Liverpool. "Rwffio," as it is known, is, briefly, the construction of an upward shaft, following the cleavage under the layer of hard rock which overlies the slate vein. It proceeds onwards and upwards at an angle to emerge in the level of the floor above. The driving of a full-length roofing tunnel is to secure or improve ventilation on the new floor. It also serves as the base of operations for the next phase in the miner's task—widening an opening to the new chamber.

Having secured the "roofing" and procured the ventilation, the miners return to a point near the foot of their tunnel and attack the slate at right-angles, clearing a working space ten yards wide and about four feet high along the face of slate.

Driving . . .



Widening . . .

The "slice" taken out represents foothold and elbow-room for the first pair of rockmen to start quarrying the slate.

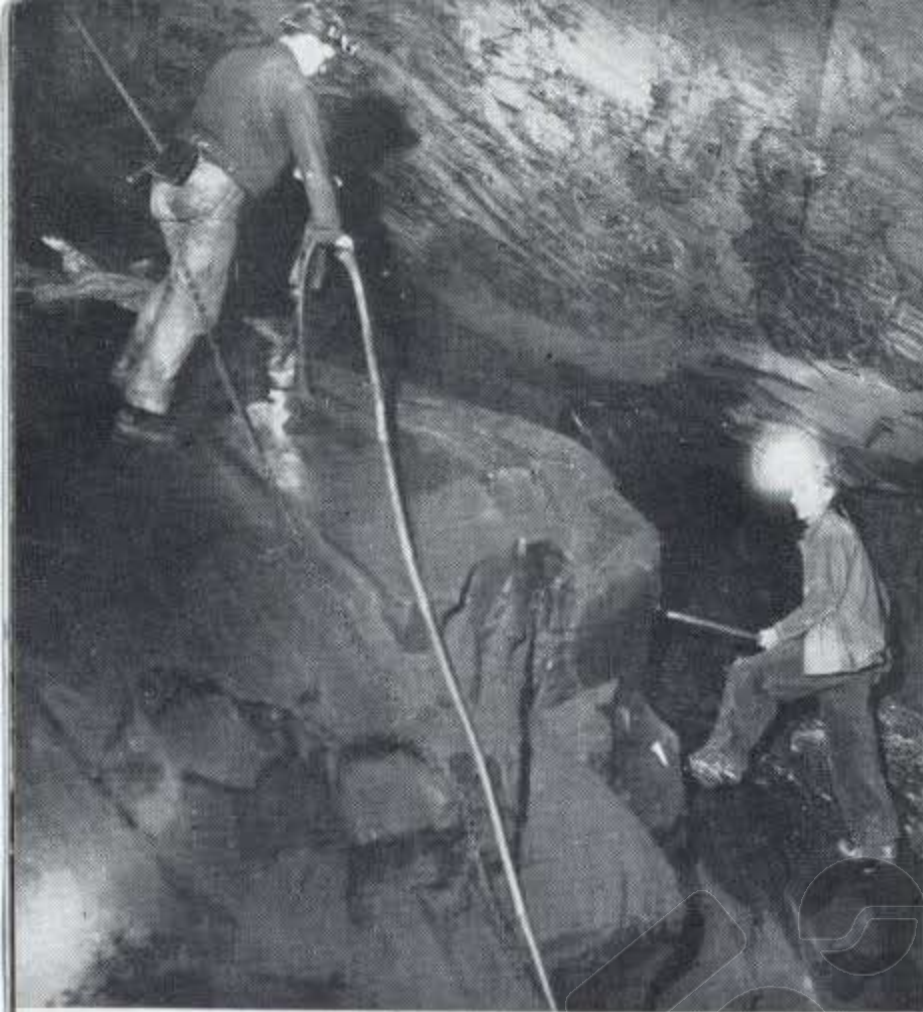
The Chamber is Opened

The place is ready. The chamber is opened; it remains for the rockmen or the safety "securers" to render the opening safe for work and we arrive at the beginning of things—the first stab with the drill at new slate for the "roof of the world."

The miner's work, however, is never done. He goes on driving his level, allowing for the next supporting wall, then, into the slate again, roofing and widening for another chamber, providing working places with a possible life of between ten and twenty years.

When not engaged in this fashion, the miner may be called to a fully-expanded chamber to hew out a "ceiling bon," which is quite an engineering feat in stone. The "ceiling bon" is a bridge left in the natural rock some sixty or seventy feet up the face of the cavern and





The Chamber is Opened

immediately under the floor above. This is done to enable rockmen to pursue the good slate lying under the chamber above them and, in time, to work through to that chamber without disturbing a highway carrying traffic on a busy floor. He has the job, too, of diverting levels round and through the walls in order that maximum development shall be achieved in worthwhile well-worked chambers.

The miner is not only in at the beginning of things, he sees them through at the end. He may never have glimpsed that parcel of slates which the boy said came from the South End, Liverpool, but it was *his* drill, nevertheless, which first opened the way to securing them.



Early example of walling or pillaring. (See Samuel Holland's Diary pp. 22-23).

"DIWEDD MIS"—

—An onlooker reports on a traditional event

"DIWEDD MIS," or "End of Month", at Oakeley and Votty is no time for a stranger to go poking about the quarries marvelling at this or asking about that, and expecting a reply.

The rhythm of work moves rather more intently that day, coming to a climactic stop in mid-afternoon—the time marking the completion of the monthly "bargain" arrived at between the quarryman and the company, and the beginning of the "Big count" preparatory to the presentation of his "bill."

Standing by as an onlooker at "Diwedd Mis," the stranger, accustomed to other industries and other ways, cannot fail to be impressed by the strong strain of individualism and tradition embodied in the ritual of the quarryman's "bargain."

At the beginning of a four weeks rota "bargains" are struck and agreed. The slate quarrymen go to work in groups, normally of four men—two getting the rock, two making the slates. When "Diwedd Mis" comes round, what might be termed the results of the "bargain" are then worked out on output achieved and are the earnings of the group for the month.

The Big Count

In the afternoon, on the particular Friday marking the end of the working month, the rhythmic note of mill machinery dies away and stops. Tools are put away and places tidied up. It is then, in the quiet of the afternoon, that slates stacked in the bays are counted and the slatemaker, writing with a six-inch nail on a piece of slate, concentrates on his calculations.

Intrigued by the six-inch nail, which is wielded with the facility and fluency of the new-fangled "ball-pens," the on-



... writing with a six-inch nail!

looker is tempted to glance over the shoulder of the intent figure bent over his slate to be surprised and impressed by the fine copperplate style of the writing. The quality of the calligraphy is not unusual. It is, in fact, an incidental trait, part of the general pride in craftsmanship.

The figures are checked against the calculations of inspectors and, if necessary, argued and proved. Try and contact an official, or a quarryman during this curious hiatus. The silence indoors is equalled only by the stillness outdoors.

And the Big Pay

Animation is not restored, or so it seems, until ten minutes before four o'clock. By this time all accounts have been balanced and accepted and there is a general movement by the conclaving groups to the quarry pay office. Not that the accounts just agreed can be paid



THE "BIG PAY"

immediately, of course. There is much calculation to be done in the wages office before the "big pay" is made next week, but every Friday during the month there is the interim pay to be collected. A group leader collects the wage for himself and colleagues, a smooth and rapid process emulated in the next phase, which is the "share out" on the spot.

The "big pay" includes the balance of the earnings on the month's contract. For the uninitiated this might be described as the equivalent of piece-rates accruing in excess of a basic rate—a balance that, in the well-ordered manner of things typical of the solid, unchanging character of the community, will be devoted to the best possible uses.

Dust Extraction Report—continued

The network of light-metal conduits seen in the picture at Bone Shaft cater for the twenty-one tables in the New Mill. The business end of the apparatus is at the extremity of each of the pairs of suction pipes, one running from below and one from above each table to the larger conduit traversing the

whole length of the mill. The individual "cleaners" seek out and swallow the dust by means of powerful pneumatic suction, the dust being disposed of outside the building.

Our technicians are still engaged developing ideas and testing devices with a view to improving dust extraction.



New Installation, Bonc Shaftt.

DUST EXTRACTION:

Progress Report

DUST extraction continues to concern our technicians and the company's consultants. Pioneers in dust suppression, initiative which was commended by Mr. Alfred Robens, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Fuel and Power, during his visit of inspection to the Votty Quarry last year, we go on experimenting in pursuit of the ideal.

On this page we illustrate a further measure of the progress which has been achieved—the new dust extraction installation in Bonc Shaftt Mill at the Oakeley Quarries, which came into operation at mid-

summer. We can give graphic proof of the efficiency of these extractors by means of the accompanying photomicrographs of Konimeter samples of dust in the air *only one foot from the saws at work*, taken with the suction on and off, and enlarged 200 times.



Suction on . . .



Suction off . . .

Continued on page 8

ON DUTY



“Making Things”—His Hobby

HERE we have Ifor Lloyd Jones at the controls of the winding gear operating the Tuxford incline at Votty. Isolated in his cabin high above the Votty workings, with a view across to Oakeley and beyond (weather permitting!), Ifor on duty, is in charge of one of our busiest and steepest inclines. Off duty he is a keen and successful amateur cabinet maker, a hobby he adopted as much by tradition as inclination. His father, William Lloyd Jones, was a joiner at Votty, and Ifor has been “making things” ever since he can remember.

He learned a lot watching his father work and branched out into the skilled and satisfying hobby of cabinet-making when he returned from a spell abroad flying and fighting with the paratroops of the 6th Airborne Division. His “on duty” jobs with this famous unit included participation in the epic airborne assault on Arnhem. Ifor Lloyd Jones is now busy making furniture for his own home at Manod. He has completed a handsome dresser and sideboard. In the “off-duty” picture you see him entering a new phase in his hobby—the construction of a saw table with which he hopes to speed up the work he has in hand this winter. He has one other off-duty pursuit of which most of us are aware. It is a long association with the local silver band, recently re-formed. His instrument is the cornet.



Second Nature

Latent in most of us in this quarrying community are the instincts of a peasant ancestry. Move wherever we will in the Oakeley or Votty mines there will be



OFF DUTY



found one or more who, expert though he may be in the slate industry, cannot resist the call of pastoral pursuits. There are quarrymen who can talk farming as though to the manner born. It is the



way of this little world tucked in the Merioneth uplands.

Gwilym Roberts, who works on Floor "K" hitching waggons and driving the winch which hauls the empties from the bottom of "K" balance, is one of the men in this category. Gwilym is an expert sheep shearer. The snapshot picture reproduced here shows him at work in the summer, busy on a seasonal "clip" for the Bradford market. Gwilym is thoroughly at home with the shears. "It is second nature with me," he says, which, of course, is the complete explanation.

Night School Joiner

Another who drops his own tools to dabble with a joiner's kit in his spare time is Evan Lewis Evans, slatemaker at Bonc Shaft. A deft and practised hand at slate splitting, as our picture shows, Evan Lewis Evans went to night school to learn the rudiments of joinery. For him, the woodwork classes proved a great success. There he learned "the ropes," how to master the "snags" and gained the courage to launch out towards the realisation of a personal ambition—the building of his own greenhouse. A keen gardener, like many of us here, Evan Lewis Evans wanted to grow his own tomatoes, and has succeeded in his first season as woodworker and horticulturist.

Youth carries on . . .

Young Men of the Middle Mill



Learners All

WE offer welcome to six new apprentices at the Oakeley Middle Mill training school. You see the newcomers, most of them straight from school, photographed above standing, earnest and intent, watching Robert Ivor Davies, a second-year apprentice, demonstrate the approved method of splitting slate.

Note the loft of Robert's mallet and the extended first and fourth fingers in his grip of the chisel—both characteristic of the training given him by John Williams in charge of the school, and of his growing efficiency.

Like so many who are passing through, or out of the school, Robert Ivor Davies now aged sixteen, is following a family tradition.

Now for the young men standing behind part of the Middle Mill output.

On the extreme left are Meirion Roberts, aged sixteen, in workmanlike "battle-dress," and equally keen David Griffiths, aged fifteen, with sleeves rolled up, the two newest apprentices. Slatemakers-to-be, they entered the mill in August last. Next is Cyril Wyn Hughes, who started work in a shop at Blaenau Festiniog, thought better of it, and decided to follow his father and three uncles into the quarries. He joined in July and intends to become a slatemaker.

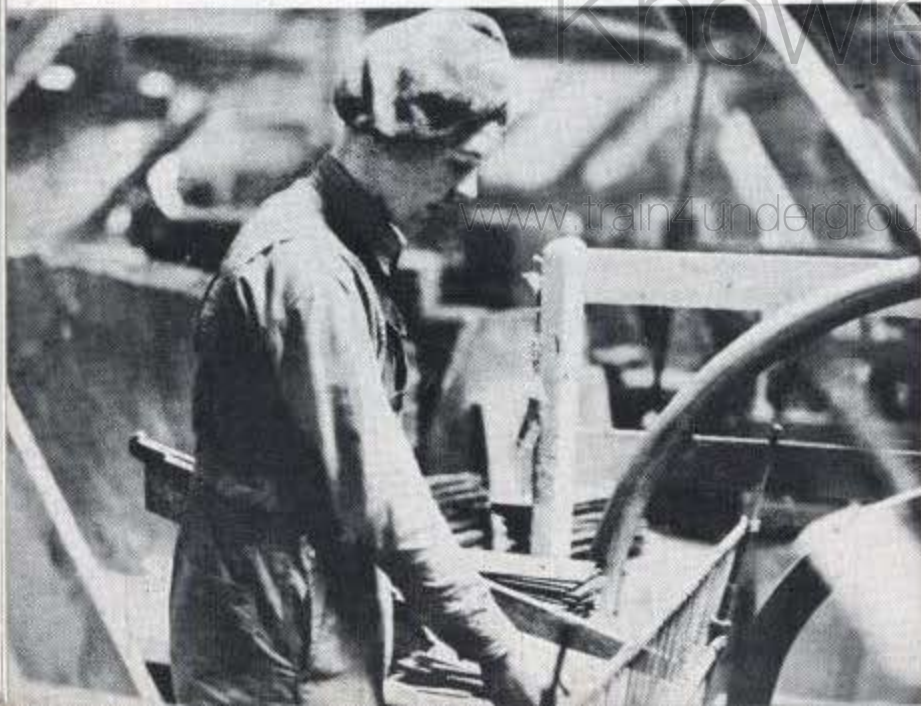
Fourth from the left is Glyn Griffiths, aged fifteen, who has been in training three months, and who is specialising as a slate dresser. Glyn Roberts, aged seventeen, fifth from the left, has been "in training" eight months and, as shown in another picture on this page is already a capable "dresser." Glyn's father is John Roberts, one time securer and rockman at Oakeley.

Last in the line of promising recruits is William Lloyd Jones, who is seventeen in October, and is another who has followed a family tradition.

The 'prentice dresser

"Scholars" at the Middle Mill

In all there are twenty young people associated with the school. Some of



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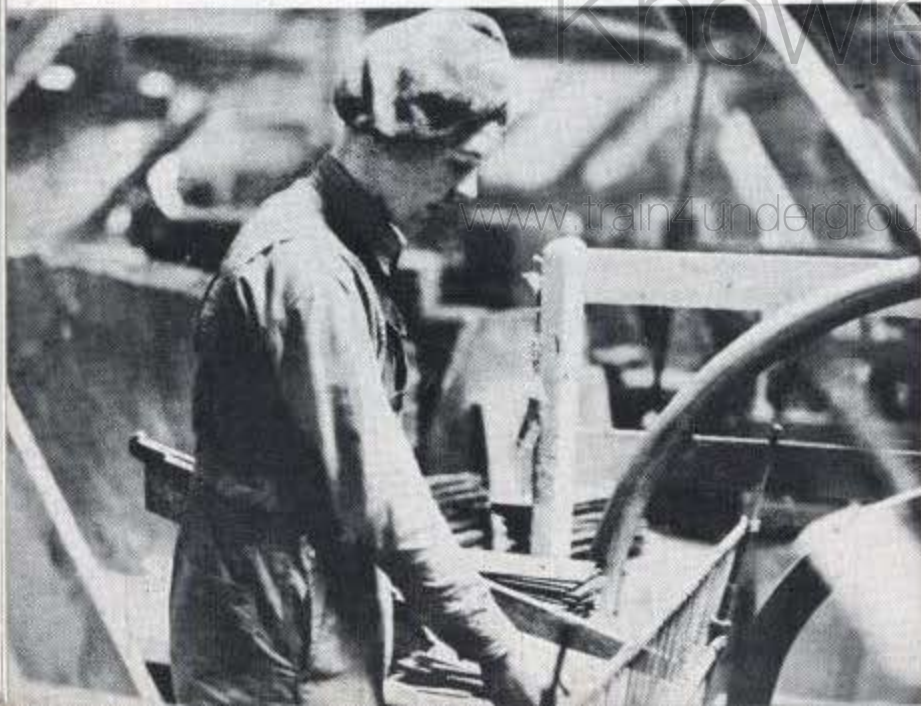
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DIRECTORS AT THE QUARRIES

INFORMAL MEETING
OF THE BOARD
at the Old Hospital,
June 27, 1950,
Sir Charles Oakeley,
Bart., presiding



Left to right:
Mr. Douglas G. Hervey,
Mr. Harry Cutts (General
Manager),
Sir Charles R. A. Oakeley,
Bart. (Chairman),
Sir Reginald H. Hoare,
K.C.M.G.,
Miss Hilda M. Inge,
and Mr. Quintin V. Hoare,
O.B.E.



Sir Charles Oakeley and Mr. Quintin Hoare
watch slate-maker H. G. Hughes at work.
Centre: Group at "C" Mill

Sir Reginald Hoare and Mr. Douglas Hervey
snapped with Gwilym Williams and John T. Roberts

The Maya called it 'Caban' 2,000 years ago!

IN a book we were reading recently, under the queer symbol you see below, was a word that caught our eye at once—"Caban." That made us look more than twice! We learned that the word "caban" was the name of a day in the "priestly picture writing of the Maya civilisations," which flourished in Central America 2,000 years ago.

This coincidental use of a word, so familiar to us, to convey the sound representing a centuries-old hieroglyph of the Western hemisphere seemed interesting enough to be worth mentioning in our magazine, but we wondered, as possibly you are wondering, what reason there was for believing that "caban" did represent this strange outline, and whether it was pronounced as we say it. So, off to the British Museum, where help was readily given with reference books and explanations.

Hieroglyphic script

The Maya civilisations covered more or less what are now the southern provinces of Mexico, Yucatan, British Honduras, Guatemala, and the north of the Honduras Republic. The link with the past was provided by Bishop Landa, who

was first Bishop of Yucatan after the Spanish Conquest. He took great interest in the Indians there. They were descendants of the Maya and used a hieroglyphic script which proves to be nearly the same as that on the Mayan monuments. Bishop Landa translated their spoken language and was able to relate the words to the appropriate signs, and he wrote a book about it in the middle of the sixteenth century. The "c" in "caban" is given as a hard "c," and, in any case, as the Bishop wrote in Spanish, there seems little doubt that the pronunciation was substantially the same as ours.

"Caban" Named a Day

Caban was the seventeenth of the day-names, of which there were twenty in all. There were eighteen of these 20-day "months" in a year, which gives 360 days. But the Maya had developed excellent astronomical data. They knew that the year was approximately $365\frac{1}{4}$ days, so, in each year they included another five days—unnamed because they were unlucky days—and in addition had a leap year every fourth year, as we do, to account for the quarter of a day. That is only a general outline. There was much complicated detail (for instance, there was another kind of month calculated according to the moon) and their number system was quite different from ours.

Worked with Stone Tools

Having dealt with "caban," perhaps a few touches to provide a background would be of interest.

The remains of various Maya settlements have been found. They built stone temples on lofty artificial mounds, and the hieroglyphic writing is a special feature of their monuments. From these records they appear to have been hunters, agriculturists, expert weavers and potters, and they worked in gold and bronze with stone tools. In case you are thinking of the horrific rites ascribed to other past

(Continued in next page)



Symbolising "caban"

Slate-maker's Philosophy



J. T. Lewis

IN my craft there is always something to learn. After 56 years as a slate-maker I was not fully tutored. I was learning to the end."

These few lines epitomise the life experience of John Trevor Lewis, slate-maker, of Bonc Coeden caban, who retired in June last, we regret to say, because of ill-health, after 56 years continuous service at Oakeley.

John, who is now 69 years, and who started at Oakeley at the age of thirteen, was inspecting his fishing rods when "Caban" called at his home in Lower Cwmbowydd Road.

We were aware of his unusual skill as a slate-maker, his reputation as a careful

economical worker, and his uncanny facility for producing the absolute maximum from whatever the material to hand, and we invited him to share the secret of his success for the benefit and guidance of the young generation now working their way through the Middle Mill, and others waiting to come in.

"When I started work at the age of thirteen," said John, "we took a pride in our white mole-skin trousers and a pride in our job. We were for ever learning from our elders, trying to emulate the most skilled. For my part I never finished learning. It was that, I think, and the new problems always cropping up, which made the job so interesting."

"I don't think I lost a day except for a brief illness once or twice. My advice to the young slatemaker is to learn the 'whys and wherefores' of his trade and industry, pay attention to detail, develop his skill and then, when problems occur, tackle them resolutely. In this way the slatemaker will always be learning. It is good for the soul and good for the job."

A keen angler, with a preference for the mountain pools, John Lewis admits that in this pursuit, too, his skill is still "in the process of development." We wish him and Mrs. Lewis, in the words of his colleagues, "Many years in which to wind the clock," the gift from Caban Bonc Coeden.

The Maya called it "Caban"—Continued

American civilisations, as far as is known the Maya did not go in for human sacrifices.

As to the time when their civilisations flourished, they must have developed over a considerable period, but so far inscriptions at various

settlements have been calculated to date in European time from several centuries B.C. to about 340 A.D. There is much, however, that is not understood—in fact the final comment at the British Museum was to the effect that the attempt to unravel some of the problems "could drive you crazy!"

Conversation Piece . . .

Not all that glistens at Blaenau Ffestiniog after a summer shower is slate. Impressions gained by visitors are lasting and are sometimes revealed in unexpected ways. For instance, there was an earlier Lord Lytton who, succumbing to a mood characteristic of Omar Khayyam, wrote of a visit to the local glens and waterfalls in this strain :

“With a loving wife, a bosom friend, and a good set of books, one might pass an age here, and think it a day.”

The sentiment may sound extravagant, but visitors assure us that it rings truthfully.

The approaches to Blaenau Ffestiniog, whether by the wooded Lledr Valley, with its tumbling rills, or, from the opposite direction, up the equally lovely valley watered by the Dwyryd, from Portmadoc Bay, are unfailing sources of inspiration for the artist and poet.

On the 'Phone

We like hearing about it, though, may be, we are slow to talk about it.

The last time we heard the praises sung it was on a telephone!

It was in part of a business conversation which took place when a well-

known London roofing contractor telephoned our London Office.

The conversation went something like this :

“I think I'll take a trip up to North Wales soon,” said the contractor.

“Good idea,” we said, adding, “Why not look in at the quarries while you're there?”

“Yes, I'd like to call there again. I was in North Wales last autumn, by the way, It was really marvellous.”

“It is lovely, isn't it?” we ventured.

“Lovely? It is wonderful! The colouring was magnificent, russet and brown. I'm using a lot of superlatives, but I feel I must do so when speaking about that part of the world. It *is* truly magnificent . . . We thought the route up to Ffestiniog was particularly delightful.”

“You came up the valley?” we inquired.

“Yes, up the valley from Portmadoc—lovely scenery, with woodland, streams and the mountains beyond—indescribable!”

“Well, we hope you enjoy your next visit as much.”

“I'm looking forward to it,” said the voice at the other end. “I'm very keen on North Wales—might say sentimental about it. However, about those slates . . .”

The late Lord Lytton, it seems, has another devotee.

Roof of the World—Continued

The picture from Pembrokeshire shows a corner of the attractive Maes-hyfyrd building scheme of the Fish-guard and Goodwick Council. We are indebted for this to Messrs. T. P. Jones, Ltd., through whom we supplied the slates. We particularly like the pair of houses seen on the left of the photograph. The Council, we gather, is very proud of this scheme and entered it in the national competition for the best housing site.

Oakeley and Votty slates, of course, are going to many other parts and we would welcome opportunities of illustrating in these pages how our slates are helping in the provision of sorely needed homes, and in many other important classes of building.

If others among our readers in the trade could oblige us with photographs of their more interesting jobs we would be grateful indeed.

ROOF OF THE WORLD

IT is natural, when we work hard to make something, that we should feel a great interest in the use to which it is put. We are, therefore, very glad to reproduce two photographs recently received from friends in the trade, showing housing schemes on which our slates have been used.

The first is from Leeds, one of the earliest places to get going with its post-war housing schemes. For a long time now we have been sending slates to Messrs. John Atkinson & Son, Ltd., towards the roofing of Leeds houses. Their Managing Director, Mr. F. E. Ashford, who kindly sent the photograph in the adjoining column showing a typical roof on the first housing scheme, tells us that the City Architect, Mr. R. A. H. Livett, A.R.I.B.A., very much likes the colour and quality of the slates.



Roofs Over Leeds

Mr. Ashford is sure that many slates will be used also on future schemes, for there is still much to be done. He confirms the continued liking of the majority of architects in the North for the slated roof.

(Continued on page 18)



New Homes For Fishguard

Holiday Snaps

Competition Result



First Prize: Edward Jones.

ALTHOUGH a disappointing season for the amateur cameraman, our summer holiday photograph competition attracted a fair number of contestants, revealing once again the wide variety of interests and scenes which appeal to quarrymen on holiday.

We reproduce here the selected work of the several prize winners. The unsuccessful, we hope, will not be deterred, but will continue with their hobby watching always for a winner for next time.

The holiday spirit imbues all four pictures of our choice. Edward Jones' first prize snap of the Guards on parade brings to mind the wish we all have on a first visit to London—a glimpse of Buckingham Palace. He has succeeded admirably in capturing both the setting and the scene. Second prize goes to

Evan Richards for his happy study of bathers photographed *in* the sea at Llandudno. He appears to have been lucky in his choice of subjects and in the burst of sunshine illuminating the scene. Dan Jones and William R. Hughes, who share the third prize, chose contrasting themes, the one a homely picture of leisure spent on a farm, the other a dainty memento of a day trip to Gwrych Castle, Abergele.

Second Prize: Evan Richards.





Equal Third: W. R. Hughes and Dan Jones.

SHOCK FOR THE "OLD LADY"

Cadwgan Jones, of New York, who runs the breezy *Welsh-American Magazine*, and whose "hands-across-the-sea" missioning down the years has been reflected at many an "Overseas Welcome" at National Eisteddfodau, has been paying a flying visit to London during which he "took in" our London Office to call on our General Manager.

Running through his story of how "London Looked Good to U.S." in the summer *Welsh-American* we were rather surprised to see Cadwgan say in his best Pepysian manner: "Now, to the office of the Oakeley Slate Quarry around Threadneedle Street, where they sell gold bars and grey slates in their TOP HATS." We stopped there trying to conjure up that amazing picture under the portals of the Bank of England. Our cartoonist has done it for us.



"Best Old Vein!"

Samuel Holland's Diary

Industrialist . . . Educationist . . . and Man of Ideas

In the fourth and final extract from the diary of Samuel Holland, quarrymaster, the man is revealed both by his enterprise and his humanism. It will be recalled that in the last extract the diarist described the Portmadoc turnpike and a curious coincidence concerning it. He reverts now to the slate quarries and the new and thriving Ffestiniog Railway.

“ALL parties (except Messrs. Turner & Casson, who worked Dyffws slate quarry—the oldest and only one in that neighbourhood before my father began to work at Rhiwbryfdir) eventually agreed to use the little Railway, finding it much cheaper, more expeditious, and no occasion for boats and not being subject to spring tides, etc., and the facility of getting the slates regularly to Port Madoc without much damage and at far less cost than by the old mode—and the slates being much less damaged; erected wharves or quays at Port Madoc, made use of the line—but other parties were induced to come and seek and work for other slate quarries in the neighbourhood and, eventually, there were ten slate quarries being worked and all their slates that were made were brought down to Port Madoc so that the traffic on the railway increased to such an extent that horses could not do the work required.”

(The horses, of course, were used to haul the empty waggons up to Blaenau Ffestiniog and travelled down again in special boxes attached to the trains of full waggons that ran down to the coast by gravity.)

There follows a description of the difficulty of getting suitable locomotives

until Sam Holland's nephew, Charles, himself designed one which “proved very successful.”

Walls Versus Pillars . . .

In 1838 Samuel Holland happened to visit some limestone quarries near Dudley. This visit had important consequences.

“I noticed that the good limestone was overlapped by a considerable thickness of an inferior kind, which would have been expensive to remove and of no value; they therefore undermined it and supported it by walls (not pillars). I observed this particularly as the Welsh Slate Company finding the good slate in their quarry was covered over by an immense top of hard rock (perfectly valueless), they had adopted the plan of leaving pillars to support it and so working out the good slate, out between the pillars—leaving a space of about 30 or 35 feet between each pillar, I had adopted this plan in my Southern Quarry, but after seeing the Dudley Limestone Quarries and doubting the unsafety of pillars, I mentioned the idea of walls to my foreman on my return—he advised me to adopt it. We did so in the Northern Quarry.”

Walls Proved Best . . .

“Afterwards, in the Southern Quarry and we worked the good slate out, for a space of several hundred feet between the walls, and they have never given way but remain firm to the present time. Whereas most of, or many of the pillars left by the Welsh Slate Company and Mathews Company have given way and fallen down, bringing an immense quantity of overhanging top with them and causing an interminable and very costly lawsuit between Mr. Oakeley and the Welsh Slate Company—two of my pillars had given way in my Southern Quarry.”

Sam Holland made many journeys to see and become acquainted with Slate Merchants and to sell them slates. “I formed some very good connections particularly in South Wales, at Newport, Swansea, Cardiff. Also at Bristol, Bridgewater, Gloucester and other places, as well as at Plymouth, Exeter, Lymington, Southampton and other ports on the South Coast—as well as in London, Hull, Newcastle and other places on the East Coast, and in Scotland.”

First Ffestiniog School

The record shows that it was Sam Holland who laid out and did most of the work on a new direct road from Tany Manod to Four Crosses to improve access to Rhiwbryfdir, and goes on to describe the development of schools in the district.

“The first school for Festiniog Village was opened below the village near the 'Rallt Fawr . . . 27 May, 1829. Afterwards Mrs. Oakeley built a school and schoolmaster's house at Llwyn y Gell—afterwards a large school was erected by subscriptions and otherwise of the quarrymen at Dolgarregddu. I erected a small school house at Tanygrisiau which was supported by the people there, but, as other schools were established, I converted mine at Tanygrisiau into five cottages. As education progressed, 5

large schools—board schools—were erected in the parish and were well supported and well conducted by Able Masters”

“Mrs. Oakeley laid the first stone of a new Church she built in Blaenau Festiniog (called St. David's, July 23, 1840).”

Resourceful Holland

Samuel Holland had other interests. He mentions the difficulties of carrying the railway over the Menai Straits until a tubular bridge was suggested. He was concerned in the move to develop a harbour at Porthdynllaen, and even took a lease of Gwylwyr Mountain to provide the stone. This harbour would presumably have been the port for the railway instead of Holyhead, because the successful crossing of the Straits led to the abandonment of the plan (at any rate for the time being). However, the resourceful Holland, having a lease of the mountain, thought he might make setts.

The Man Named Trefor

“I went with a man I had in my employ, one Trevor Jones, over Pen Maen Mawr, where there were two or three quarries for making sets, we observed them and the making of them, and I at once engaged two men to come over with their hammers to Gwylwyr, and we tried the stone, they pronounced so favourably of them that I set to work to make paving sets.”

He was successful, but found again that it took too much of his time from the slate quarries, so he sold the works. Saml. Holland happily records that the new owners, when they later started quarries at Llanfairtalhaiarn “caused a village to be built called after my old friend and their foreman, Trevor Jones, and called Pentre Trefor.”

Except for one more reference to Porthdynllaen, there ends Samuel Holland's journal—a record of events which animated life and industry at Blaenau over 100 years ago.

See “EARLY EXAMPLE OF WALLING,” page 6

News Exchange...



W. J. Morris, tenor

EISTEDDFODIC laurels hang easily on the heads of Ffestiniog men. We take pleasure now in recording the success of another quarryman tenor—William John Morris, slatemaker at the

Middle Quarry Mill, Oakeley Quarries, who was awarded third prize in the open tenor solo competition at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod in July last. It was his first big venture as a solo competitor.

Singing seriously ever since he was twenty—he is now 39—William Morris developed early as a pennillion exponent, a form of musical expression peculiar to Wales and, in these days, a style almost exclusive to the Merionethshire area. In association with Llew Dwyryd and Ioan Dwyryd, singing in duets, he secured awards at National and local eisteddfodau, and has four silver cups as proof of his prowess.

Latterly, William Morris has aimed at the development of a wider expression of his art. It was this zeal which took him to Llangollen, where he gained the adjudicator's approbation with a rendering of "Il Mio Tesoro," from Mozart's opera "Don Giovanni."

We have him now as a member of the Quarry Choir, and next year he hopes to compete in the tenor solo competition at the Llanrwst National Eisteddfod. Even at this distance we might wish him well.

Côr Meibion yr Oakeley

(Our correspondent describes the Quarry Choir outing)

NI chafwyd fawr o drafferth i ddeffro neb o aelodau y Côr bore Sadwrn, Mai 20, oherwydd ar wahan i'r flaith ei bod yn ddiwedd mis, yr oedd *trip* wedi ei drefnu i Groesoswallt, a phawb wedi bod yn edrych ymlaen ato ers rhai wythnosau.

Cychwynwyd am hanner awr wedi wyth o'r Blaenau trwy Lan Ffestiniog i Drawsfynydd, ac ymlaen oddiyno i Ddolgellau. Galwyd ein sylw droeon yn y bws cymfforddus y teithiem ynddo at y ffyrdd rhagorol tuag at ac allan o ganoldref y sir, ond y peth a'n blinai wrth sylwi ar y ffyrdd rhagorol oedd

paham tybed y gadawai y Cyngor Sir ffyrdd y Blaenau mewn cyflwr mor druenus mewn cydmariaeth.

Aethom ymlaen o Ddolgellau am Ddinas Mawddwy trwy wlad ramantus a'i golygfeydd yn odidog. Yno arhoswyd am beth amser gyda'r bwriad o gael golwg ar y Ffatri Wlân, ond yn anffodus yr oedd ynghau a'r dwr yn brin iawn. Cafodd rhywrai oedd heb gael llawn digon o amser i frecwast gyfle i gael cwpaned o de a bara menyn blasus mewn tŷ hwylus ar fin y ffordd, tra yr oedd eraill ar bont y pentre yn sylu ar y brithyll ym masddwr yr afon.

Dyddiau Olaf Dolwyn

Oddiyno aethpwyd ymlaen i Lanwyddyn i weld y llyn enfawr sydd yn diodi miloedd tref Lerpwl. Yn y fan hon y tynnwyd llawer o ddarluniau y ffilm "Dyddiau Olaf Dolwyn" ("Last Days of Dolwyn"). Yr oedd gwllith ysgafn wedi ein dilyn bob cam o'r Blaenau hyd nes yr oeddym wedi gadael y Dinas, ac erbyn cyrraedd Croesoswallt yr oedd heulwen siriol yn ein croesawu. Wrth gwrs, 'roedd pawb yn barod am ei ginio, a dyfal fu'r holi a'r chwilio am Clarks, lle'r oedd trefniant ymlaen llaw wedi ei wneud am y bwyd. Rhaid talu teyrnged i'r bobl hynny am eu croeso a'r bwyd blasus oedd yn ein haros.

Dyma enghraifft o hiwmor iach un o aelodau rhadlonaf y côr. Amser cinio— "What will you have?" gofynnodd y forwyn, "Apple Tart and Custard or Trifle and Cream?" "Both miss", medd yntau, "Remember we're heavy workers." Chwarddodd pawb wrth gofio enw y Weinyddiaeth Lafur arnynt, a chafodd yntau ei dâl am ei ateb parod.

Chwilio am Anrhegion

Wedi'r cinio aeth pawb i'w helynt, rhai i chwareu bowls, rhai i'r siopau i chwilio am anrhegion, ac eraill i brynnu cwningod.

Cafwyd tē yn yr un man, a bu raid i'r côr ganu dan amgylchiadau pur anffafriol ac annodd cyn ymadael oddiyno. Yn dilyn ymadawyd am Langollen, lle

Visitors write about us

What might be dismissed as mundane to most of us at the quarries is usually a source of considerable interest and surprise, not to mention pleasure, to the visitors who, so to speak, "descend" upon us for the first time. Their impressions of the scene and activity below and above ground at Oakeley and Votty are always welcome.

It will be recalled that members of the Lecture Group from the Prescott Works of British Insulated Callender's Cables, Ltd., visited us in the early summer. Here, in a letter from Mr. G. Lloyd, their works superintendent, they tell us of the pleasure derived.

yr arhoswyd am rhyw ddwyawr ar y ffordd adref trwy Gorwen, Cerrig-y-Drudion a Betws-y-Coed.

Cyrhaeddwyd y Blaenau tua deg o'r gloch a phawb wedi mwynhau eu hunain yn gampus. Bydd y diwrnod yn un a erys yn ein côf yn hir iawn. Y mae mawr ddiolch yn ddyledus i'r ysgrifennydd am y trefnu da a llwyr a fu ar gyfer y diwrnod hwn.

Rhaid hefyd gofnodi y ffaith i'r côr, ar fyr rybudd, benderfynnu cystadlu yn Eisteddfod Llanuwchllyn, a rhoddodd gyfrif da ohonno ei hun mewn datganiad o "Filwyr y Groes" (Dr. Dan Protheroe) trwy ddod allan yn gyfartal drydydd.

Cyngerdd yn Harlech

Canmol mawr a glywsom i'r cyngerdd a roddwyd gan Gôr Meibion yr Oakeley (dan arweiniad Mr. W. M. Williams) yn Harlech. Mr. Hywel Williams, Llan Ffestiniog, oedd yn arwain y cyngerdd, a Mr. Tom Jones, Harlech (gynt o'r ardal hon) oedd y cadeirydd. Gyda'r côr yr oedd yr unawdwyr poblogaidd y Mri. Trebor Jones, W. J. Morris, William Roberts a Bob Roberts. Yr oedd arddeliad ar bob eitem, yn cynnwys yr unawdau rhagorol a roes Mr. John Davies ar y cornet, a chyfeiliant medrus Mr. J. Lloyd Williams. Gwledd oedd y cyngerdd o'r dechrau i'r diwedd, a llongyfarchwn bawb a gymerodd ran ynddo.

AELOD



Prescot Visitors

much more interest in slated roofs than we have done in the past. Our party, too, was duly impressed with the pleasant way in which your employees demonstrated their craft to us and their happy relationship with the management."

Mr. Lloyd had a word for the people of Blaenau Ffestiniog, adding: "Altogether it was a memorable day. We shall always retain a very warm corner in our hearts for Blaenau Ffestiniog and its people. We like your versatile magazine, 'Caban.' It is extremely well got up and the photographs are superb."

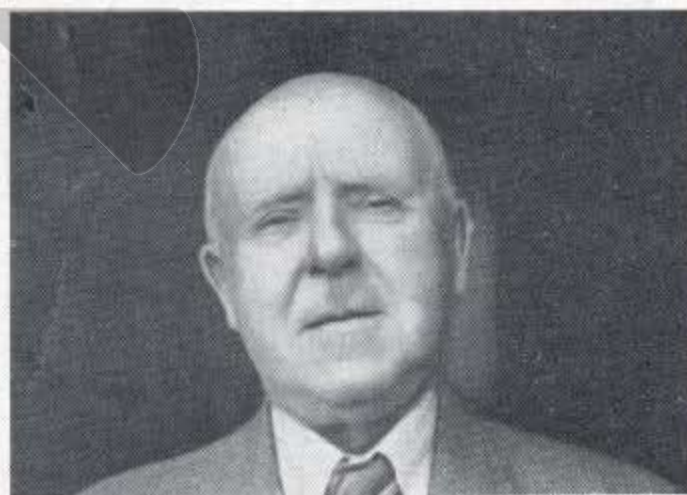
Many thanks, Mr. Lloyd.

Blaenau Ffestiniog Worthy

J. Jones Williams, chief cashier and in charge of the quarry accounts for many years, in sending a letter that shows that he is as keenly interested as ever in all that goes on at the quarries, mentioned that he recently celebrated his 73rd birthday. Congratulations!

The younger workers in our midst will have noted the point made by the slatemaker J. T. Lewis that one should learn the "whys and wherefores" early in one's career. J. Jones Williams follows that rule throughout. He served 57 years at the quarries, from 1890 to 1947, starting as a slatemaker's apprentice. After two years he was promoted by examination to the quarry staff. In 1901 he took first-class honours in the City and Guilds examination in slate quarrying and mining. In 1922 he was appointed to the position he held until his retirement.

J. Jones Williams' off-duty record has been impressive, although latterly unfortunately he has been troubled by ill-health and reluctantly has had to give up his longstanding and manifold associations with district and county affairs. For 22 years he was councillor and occasional chairman of Ffestiniog Urban District Council, and served for a similar period as governor of Ffestiniog Grammar School, Ffestiniog and District School Managers, and Ffestiniog and Deudraeth Assessment Committee. He was treasurer, and later secretary, of the local branch of the Ancient Order of Foresters, original member and one-time chairman of Merioneth Health Insurance



J. Jones Williams

Committee, and member of the Festiniog and District War Memorial Hospital Committee, acting as auditor to the hospital until the advent of the new Health Scheme.

J. Jones Williams was brought up in the tradition of the quarries. He followed his father, grandfather and great-grandfather on the well-worn path to the Oakeley Quarries.

Marriages

Since the last issue of "Caban" five of our number have taken brides. Pictures of the happy couples taken after the weddings are reproduced on the next page with our heartiest congratulations. They are:

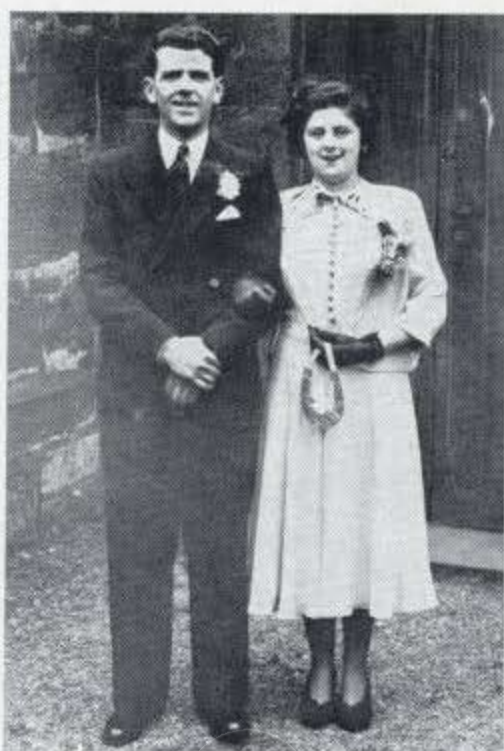
William J. Jones, whose bride is the daughter of W. M. Williams, Union Secretary, married March 3.

William R. Jones—married August 5.

Evan Jones—married August 5.

David Roberts—married August 5.

Enoch Morris—married August 8.



MARRIAGES

- (1) (Top left)
Mr. & Mrs. W. J. Jones.
- (2) (Centre)
Mr. & Mrs. W. R. Jones.
- (3) (Top right)
Mr. & Mrs. Evan Jones.
- (4) (Bottom left)
Mr. & Mrs. Roberts.
- (5) (Bottom right)
Mr. & Mrs. Morris

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LOOKING DOWN FROM TUXFORD

HAVING read on a previous page of the similarity between our own name and a term once used by inhabitants of Central America, some of our readers might think at first glance that the picture on the back page illustrates another phase in ancient history—the cliff dwellers. Let us hasten to explain, therefore, that the picture is a general view looking from the top of the Tuxford incline at Votty, showing the worked out chambers on floors “A” and “B.” with a glimpse of the discharge from the mountain watercourse in the background

and “Quarry Bank,” the quarry manager’s residence, in the distance. The caverns, seen “open to daylight,” are themselves nearly 1,000 feet above sea-level. The present Votty and Bowydd mine workings are well below them. The student of slate mining will be interested in the “stepped-down” formation of the chambers and the massive, solid, walls supporting the floors. The print reproduced with the Samuel Holland diary on page 6, giving an impression of older methods of working with pillars, emphasises the solidity of the 60 years-old Votty chamber walls.



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LOOKING DOWN FROM TUXFORD

(See previous page.)

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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