

Hugh Dwyer.

CABAN

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE OAKELEY AND VOTTY SLATE QUARRIES

CABAN

THE OAKELEY 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: Quarry Club Choir*
- *Below: Directors visit Oakeley*

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Floor to Floor

(concluded)



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Down on "R"

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TO HAVE REACHED the bottom of the Oakeley mine on Floor "R" is by no means the end of matters in the

production of slate. On the production chart the lowest point is, indeed, one of the highest factors. It is there, in conjunction

with the earlier developed chambers on "Q" that the flow of blocks to the mills is greatest.

Down on "R," about 1,000 feet in vertical depth from the level of the Quarry Office, the working chambers are still an appreciable distance above actual sea level. The burrowed mine workings lie deep into the mountain base following the angle of the slate vein.

Elbow Room

The vastness of these deep workings; the amount of "elbow room" available for the winning of slate at such depths is in sharp contrast to generally accepted impressions of underground working. The picture of a typical level on "R", hewn from the hard rock of mountain interior, itself illus-

trates the scale of engineering and mining which is preliminary to the opening of large scale development such as is the practice at Oakeley.

Our picture of R 7, in which the slate appears to have cascaded at an angle of 30 degrees to the floor of the chamber, but which in actual fact has been skilfully "quarried" by the rockmen, Thomas Jones and John Morris Jones, serves also and strikingly to illustrate the breadth and height at which it is customary to work in the practice of slate mining.

There is nothing cramped in these conditions. The diminutive figures of rockmen high up on the slate show this, too. By reason of the "wide open spaces," which

Channeller Clifford Davies in R.6, Oakeley



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A typical level on "R" floor

are the chambers, and the lofty, tunnelled approaches linking and intersecting the development areas, natural ventilation flows fresh and untrammelled from floor to floor, unfailingly.

Air

Air is also the chief source of power for the rockmen and their several aides in the traffic and labouring sections. This comes under high pressure boosted at different levels and is conveyed along a steel pipe-line of the type clearly seen running along the wall of the level on "R".

Water, as well as air, percolates to the lowest level. Water, as previously described, presents a problem of drainage in our mines; one which must be overcome by constant attention to pumping and disposal via a main water adit running out into daylight near the surface.

In R 7 the scene is set for the blasting of the big "plyg" or block of smooth surfaced slate on which one of the rockmen is seen standing.

Thomas Jones, the senior partner, the nails of his right boot making a secure anchorage on the shining sloping surface of the rock, is poised over a powder hole awaiting the powder and tamping dust which John Morris is seen bringing along the chain which acts as "life line".

Footwear

Slate rockmen may not sport the heavily-nailed boots of the week-end rock climbers who

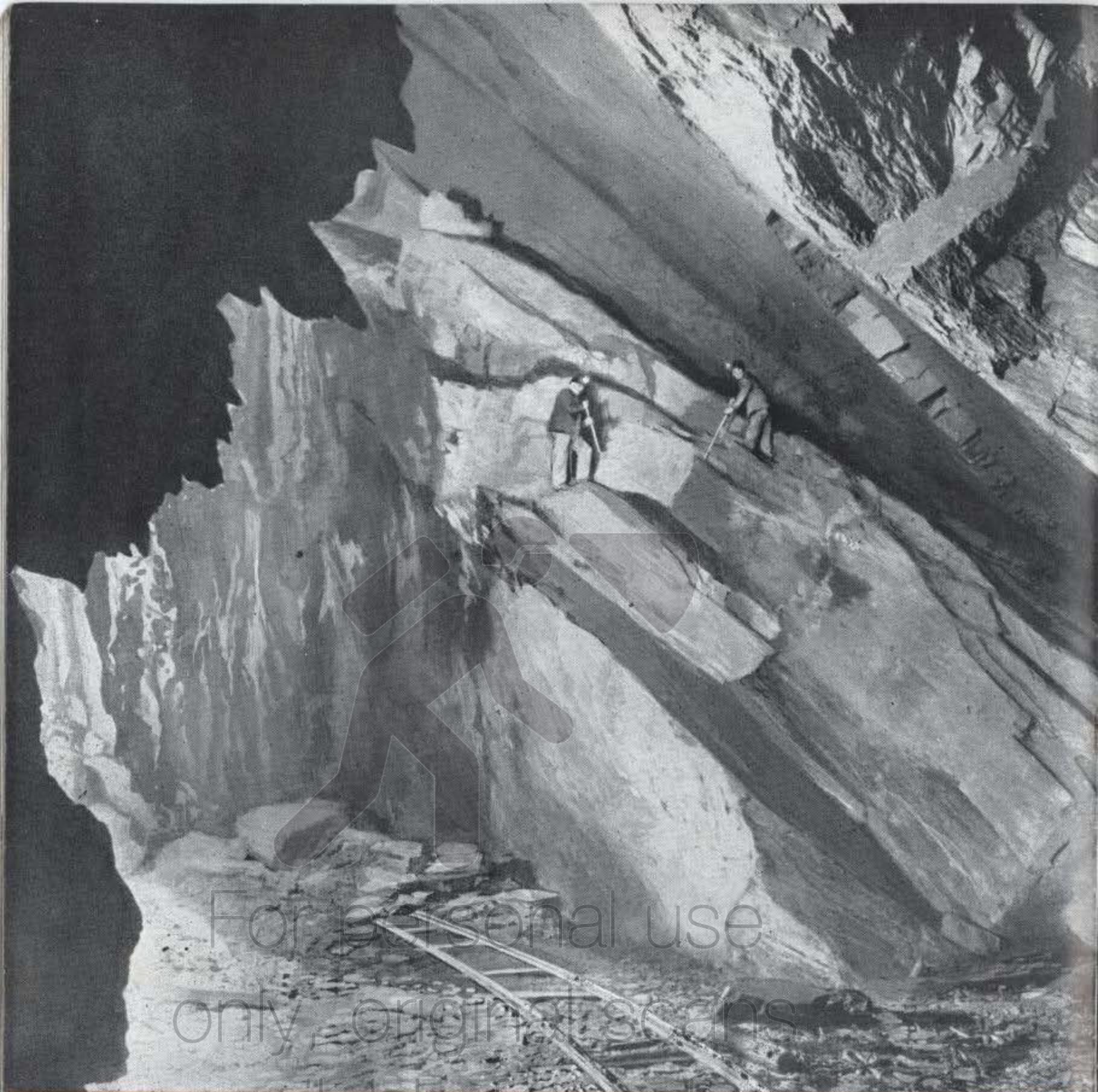




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Cascades of rock



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Widening on "K"

abound in the neighbouring Snowdonian hills, but their own footwear is by no means dainty.

They favour strong, hardwearing boots with nails strategically placed to afford a purchase on the rock surface. Experience and intuition, plus the presence of regulation chain holds, and a light

ladder where necessary, ensure security. Every step is measured. The workaday position of the two rockmen snapped actually "on the job" in R 7, is typical of the respect for the rock which becomes second nature to the skilled slate quarryman.

Thomas Jones has been working



down from floor to floor at Oakeley and Votty for over thirty years. At the age of 44 he is already a grandfather. John Morris Jones is a member of a new generation of rockmen.

Faults and Flaws

The appearance of plenty and the impression of unrestricted de-

velopment to be gained from the scene in R 7 does not deceive. At the same time, conditions in any one chamber cannot be held to be typical. The struggle always is against the known and unknown—the normal and the abnormal conditions.

Faults and flaws in the strata which upset pre-calculations are prone to reveal themselves unexpectedly. They are regarded as temporary obstacles to be overcome in the forward and upward march through the section of the vein serving a particular series of chambers.

Conditions sometimes vary sharply in adjoining chambers. It was the case in R 6, a comparatively new chamber, where conditions did not compare with the relatively open development of R 7. In the picture of R 6 channeller Clifford Jones is to be seen at work boring a cut along the bottom thickness of the steeply sloping section of the vein.

Above him the chert, the darker coloured hard rock, appears to have overlaid the slate and thus temporarily limited the scope of development. In this case the task is to continue the roofing tunnel under the chert so that the unwanted rubbish will fall down behind, and at the same time widen to work the slate forward and under the overlying strata in the expectation that the wayward chert will resume its normal position in relation to the vein.

The element of confidence in such operations is invariably justified by the collective wealth of

Continued on page 14

Checking the at Oa

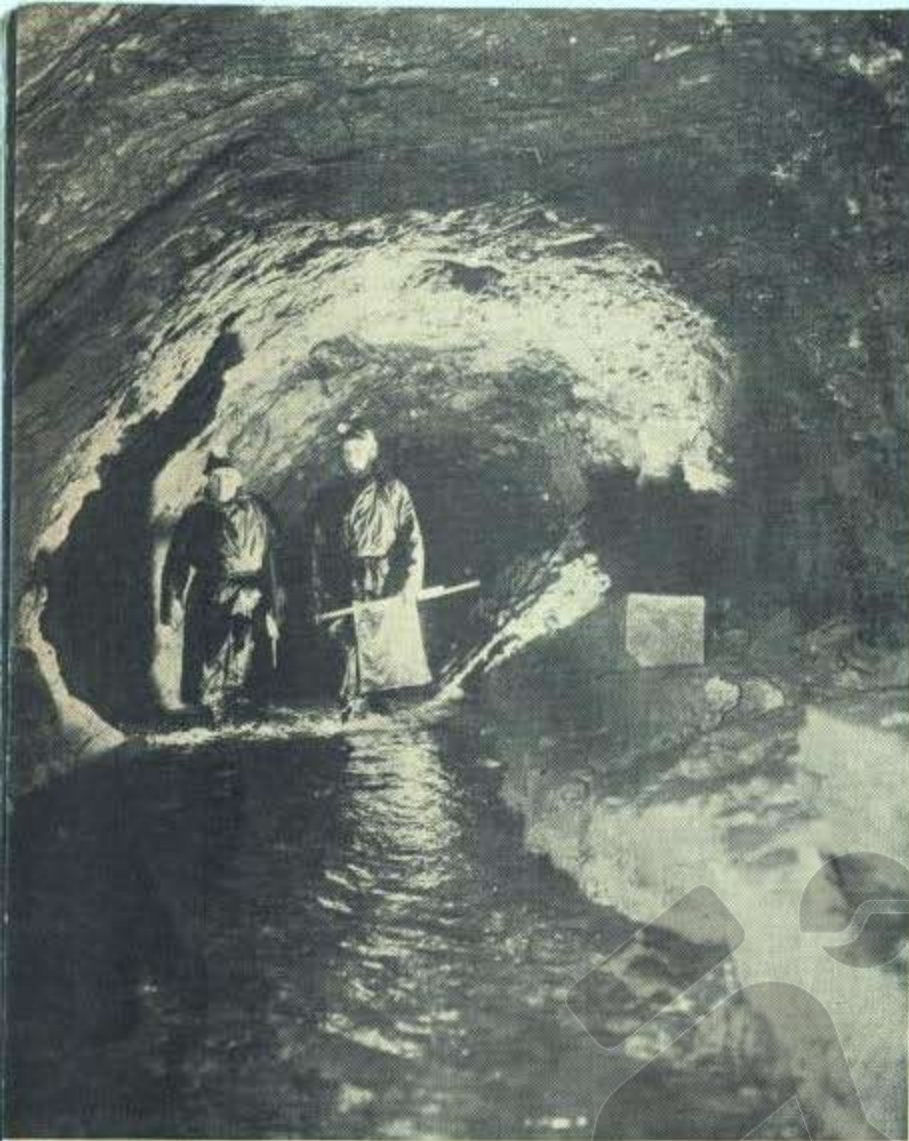
WITH all our production floors hewn from the solid rock, thus ensuring the soundest and stoutest natural supports, it may appear odd that timbermen are required in a slate mine, seemingly to reinforce the strength of the mountain in which we work.

John Arthur Jones and William Evans are the Oakeley timbermen. Like the miners they have a multiplicity of tasks, though, chiefly, they maintain a system of supplementary timber supports in the upper floors where traffic levels emerge to pass under broken ground.

In addition they have the care and maintenance of the roofing sections of the main water disposal adit, known as G. level, which drives underground for threequarters of a mile at a slight gradient to emerge in daylight near the British Railways main line tunnel entrance in Blaenau Ffestiniog, there to pour its unending flow of water pumped from the mine into a mountain stream hastening to Cardigan Bay.

Main Drain

The G level is a main drain into which finally goes the full product of the whole



Top left:

Inspection in G level water adit

Bottom left:

One of the cascades

Main Drain keley

de-watering system of the Oakeley underground workings at the rate of many thousands of gallons a minute; the leated and piped flood water from the surrounding hillside catchment area; the overflow from a high level reservoir; surface water from the quarry top and seepage through an area of broken ground traversed by the adit.

The mine is drained by dams from which water is pumped upwards to the adit from floor to floor. Directed and natural drainage from the surface cascades into the adit at appropriate points. The outward flow is natural and constant.

Roofing timbers consisting of stout uprights and neatly fitted cross members are essential along several sections of the water tunnel. It is the timbermen's job periodically to wade down the adit, plunging through curtains of water at the intakes from above to inspect, repair and replace where necessary. Our pictorial record of a recent tour of duty in G Level graphically illustrates the problem of drainage and its importance as an ancillary aspect of the primary task of slate winning.



Top right:

At work in timbered section

Bottom right:

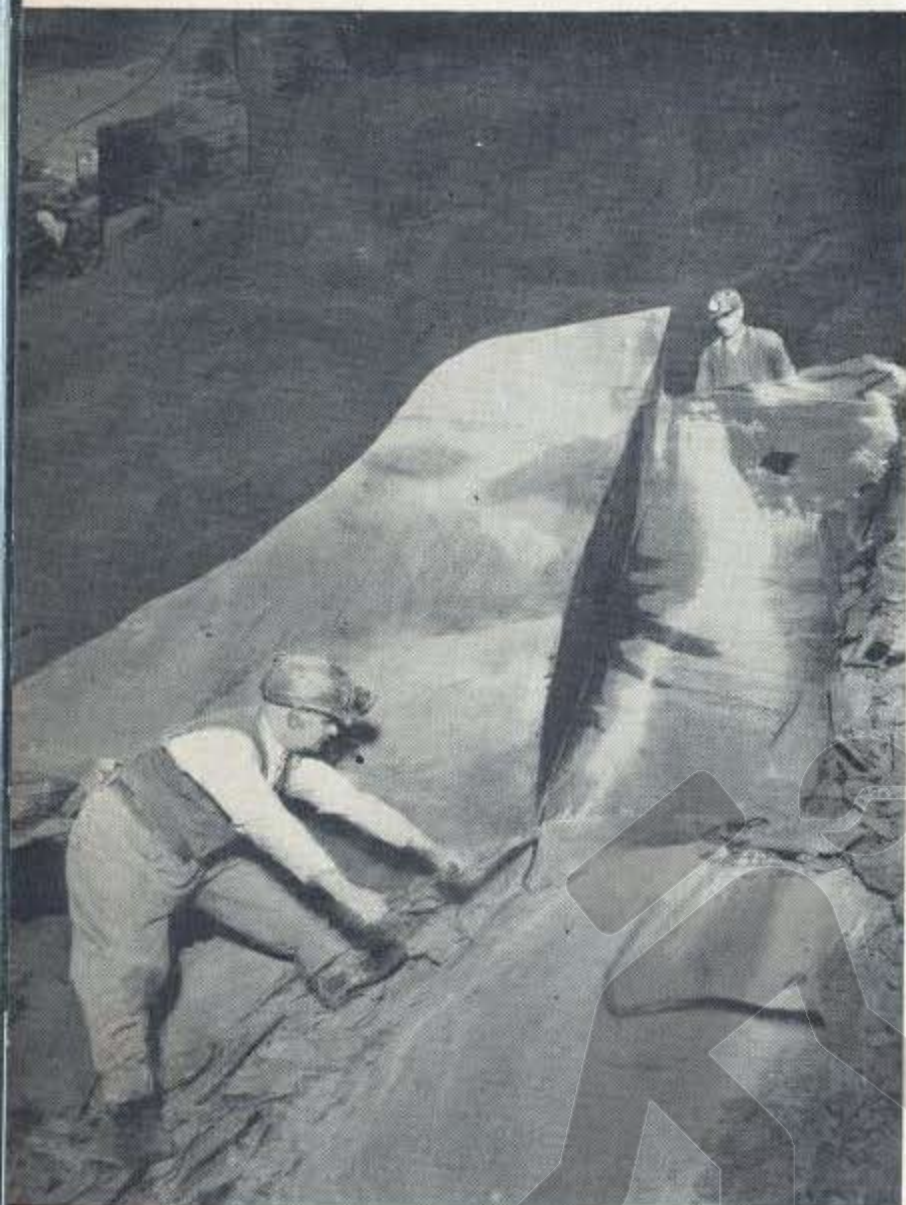
The outlet of the adit

Blocks for the 'Diamond' Saw

IN this pictorial study of progress from the live rock to the mill we illustrate, as a typical example, the several stages in the handling of slate from I Floor at Votty until they are positioned for cutting or trimming to pre-set dimensions by the giant "diamond" saw on the surface.

The picture (top left) shows Harry J. Griffiths, a rockman, with crowbar, testing the purchase on a split section of slate in the I 30 chamber. His partner, R. A. Williams, watches closely the effect from behind the big block.

Below (left) the block is down and hoisted by the rockmen ready



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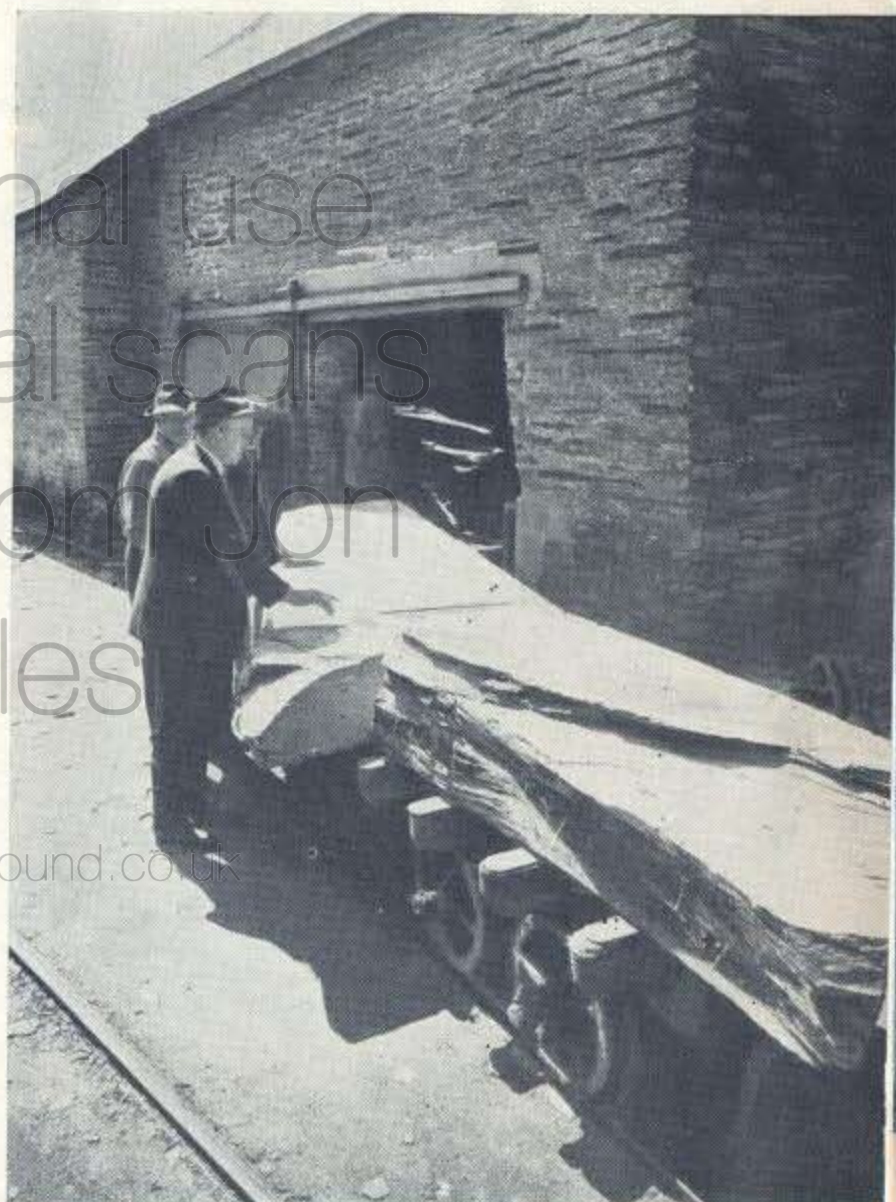


to be balanced on to the trolley underneath.

The rockman chalks the all-important identification and delivery symbol "I.30" on the pillared side of the block, a precaution which means that the block will ultimately be delivered to the rockmen's own partners in the slatemaking mill.

On the right the block is *en route* to the surface. It is part of a haulage train halted temporarily in a passby to the main incline. Under-manager O. E. Owens (right) makes an inspection while the hooker-on, Owen S. Owen, stands by.

Below (right) the block from I.30 undergoes further examination at the hands of the Votty slate inspector, R. J. Pritchard, before entering the diamond saw mill for cutting. *Continued on page 14*



Floor to Floor *(from page 9)*

knowledge of the rock which abounds in the undertaking.

The channeller's tool is a pneumatically operated drill tipped with four-bladed bits of hardened steel capable of swift and accurate penetration along a precise line and in the toughest rock.

The drills are biting into New Vein, which at R level is, in reality, the toughest slate in the mine.

Removing Snags

The calls on the miners to assist in the removal or circumvention of snags are not infrequent. In our last issue they were illustrated perched on a platform high up under the roof of K 1 chamber, starting work on a widening cut to facilitate the winning of a large

bulge of slate which an earlier generation of rockmen had left as part of the wall of the old chamber.

The effect of the operation is now clearly to be seen in our picture on page 0. An open-sided cut, or widening, has been mined along the angle of the slate, leaving a projecting triangular bulk of good slate ready and available for winning by the two rockmen, Gorwest Jones and Thomas Williams.

The pursuit of good slate is unending. Where Nature reluctantly releases her hold in one place she gives in abundance in another. In K 1 the bulky bonus block, though certainly not overlooked by the rockmen of the day, was ignored because of readier material, easier to win, and so it is that K 1 temporarily has a new lease of life.

Blocks for the 'Diamond' Saw

(from page 13)

The final scene in the progress of the blocks is that we have specially illustrated on pages 14-15. There, it will be seen, a block has arrived for cutting by the 36in. diamond-toothed circular saw. The saw, contained in its water-cooling shield, is attached to a heavy cast steel saddle. The block from I.30 is positioned in the block and tackle ready to be lowered by slatemakers R. Ivor Williams and John Williams on to the bench below. J. W. Jones, another slatemaker, is at work below, hammering into final position a block about to be trimmed by the saw.

The saw is cooled by water

introduced at a pressure of 80 lb. to the square inch. Also in the work-a-day picture is the electric gantry operator, J. E. Roberts.

The Product of the Day !

(from opposite page)

John Thomas, the other rockman partner in the working quartette.

The tall middle stack of slates in the picture comprises 24 x 14 in. roofing slates, more readily identified by the slatemakers as "princesses." The smaller stack on the extreme right are of lesser rank, being "duchesses," measuring 24 x 12 in.

The product of the day represents the finished article, sundered and split from the elongated blocks or pillars won by the rockmen partners from the vein in the chambers deep underground.

Some of the product is ear-marked for dispatch and use in the roofing of an extension to the XVII Century Pepys' Library at Cambridge.



The Product of the Day!

IT will not require an expert eye to detect that the large slates in the picture above of a big stack ranked on the ground near Bonc Coedan mill, Oakeley, are not to be confused with the product of the day—nor even of yesterday!

The slates are in fact the product of Oakeley slate mills, but were made fully eighty years ago. Until their removal this summer from the roof of the disused Penybont mill the slates performed excellent service keeping out rains which, according to local meteorological records, have, down the years, exceeded the average rainfall in all other urban areas of this country by at least three times the weight and volume.

The slates look good, and are good. The salvage has been virtually 100 per cent. They are due for further long life in the quarry as replacements, and for roofing new buildings.

In contrast, we have illustrated the product of the day by a typical team of two slatemakers and their rockmen partners.

The smiling group have met at Bonc Coedan mills for the daily ritual, near the end of the shift, of examining output and, later, of stacking the new slates before official inspection and dispatch.

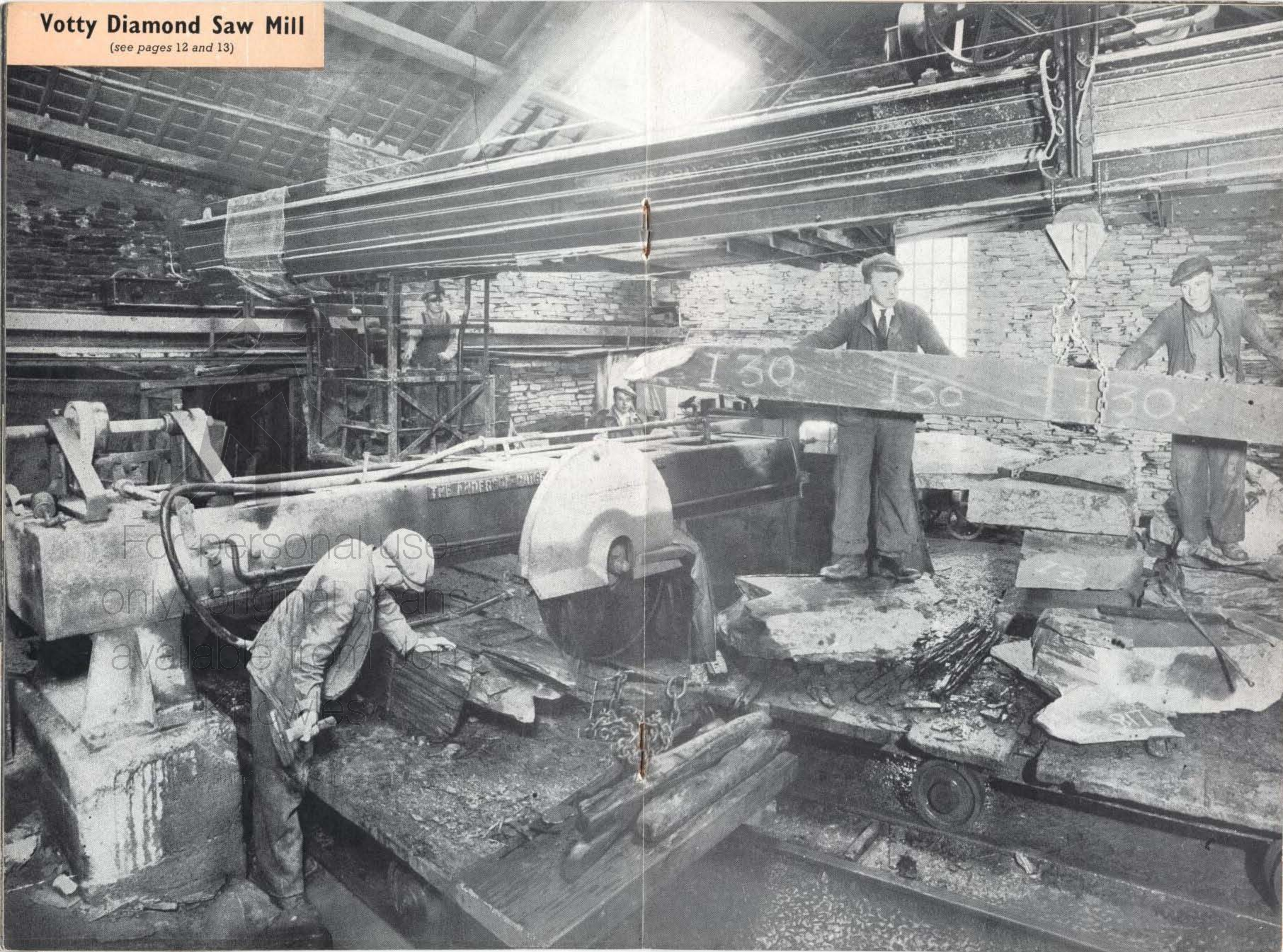
They are (left to right): E. Lloyd Jones, slatemaker; Thomas Ellis Jones, rockman from P.8; Richard Gwilym Jones, slatemaker, and David

Continued in previous page



Votty Diamond Saw Mill

(see pages 12 and 13)



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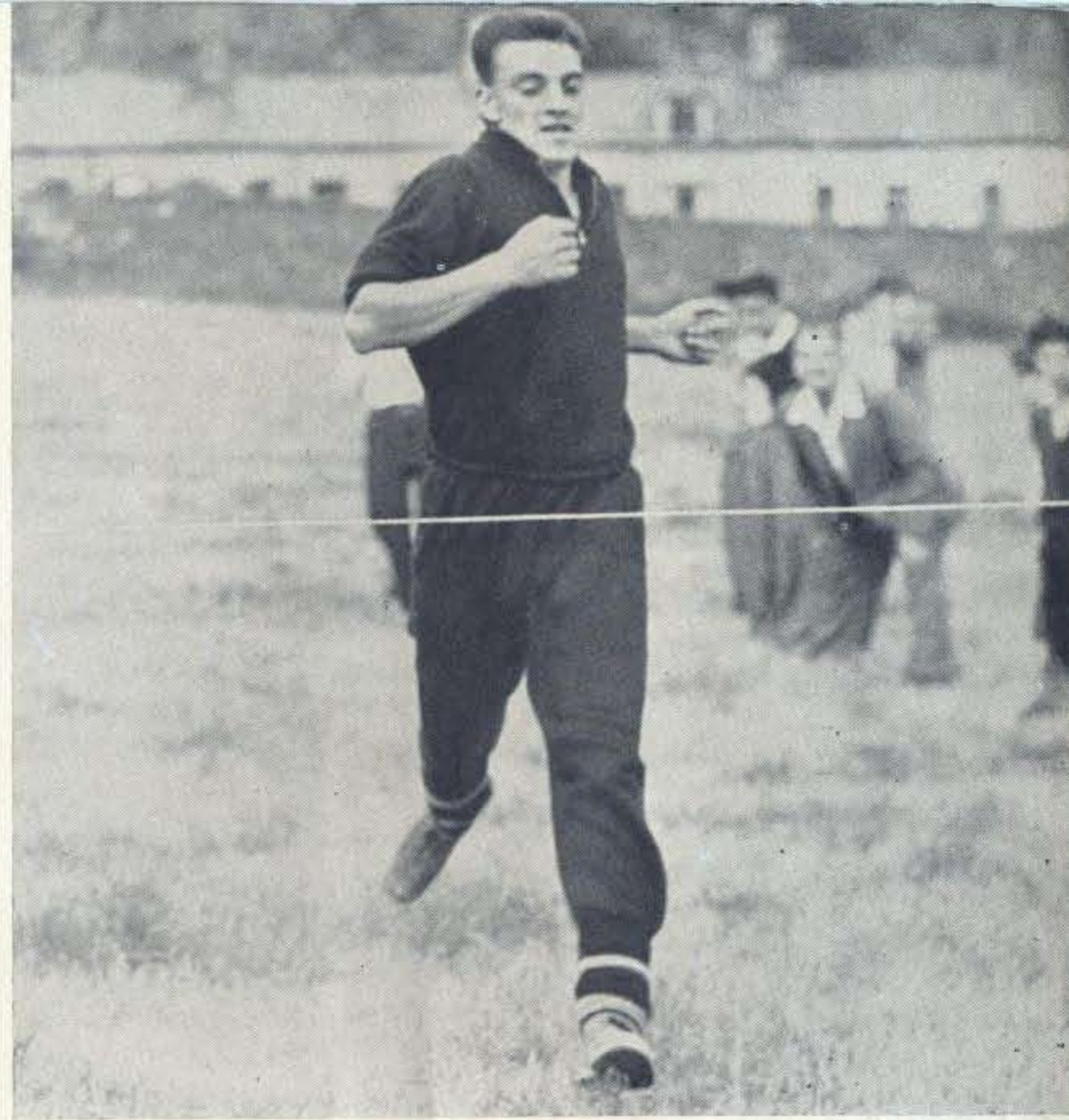
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Winners all, and the watching

crowd. (See News Exchange)

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*Great day for
the children*

(See News Exchange)



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Quarry Queen Olwen

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*Right: The candidates assemble
The selection is made*



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End of a perfect sports day—the officials relax



Report in News Exchange

In the Footsteps of the Quarryman Artist



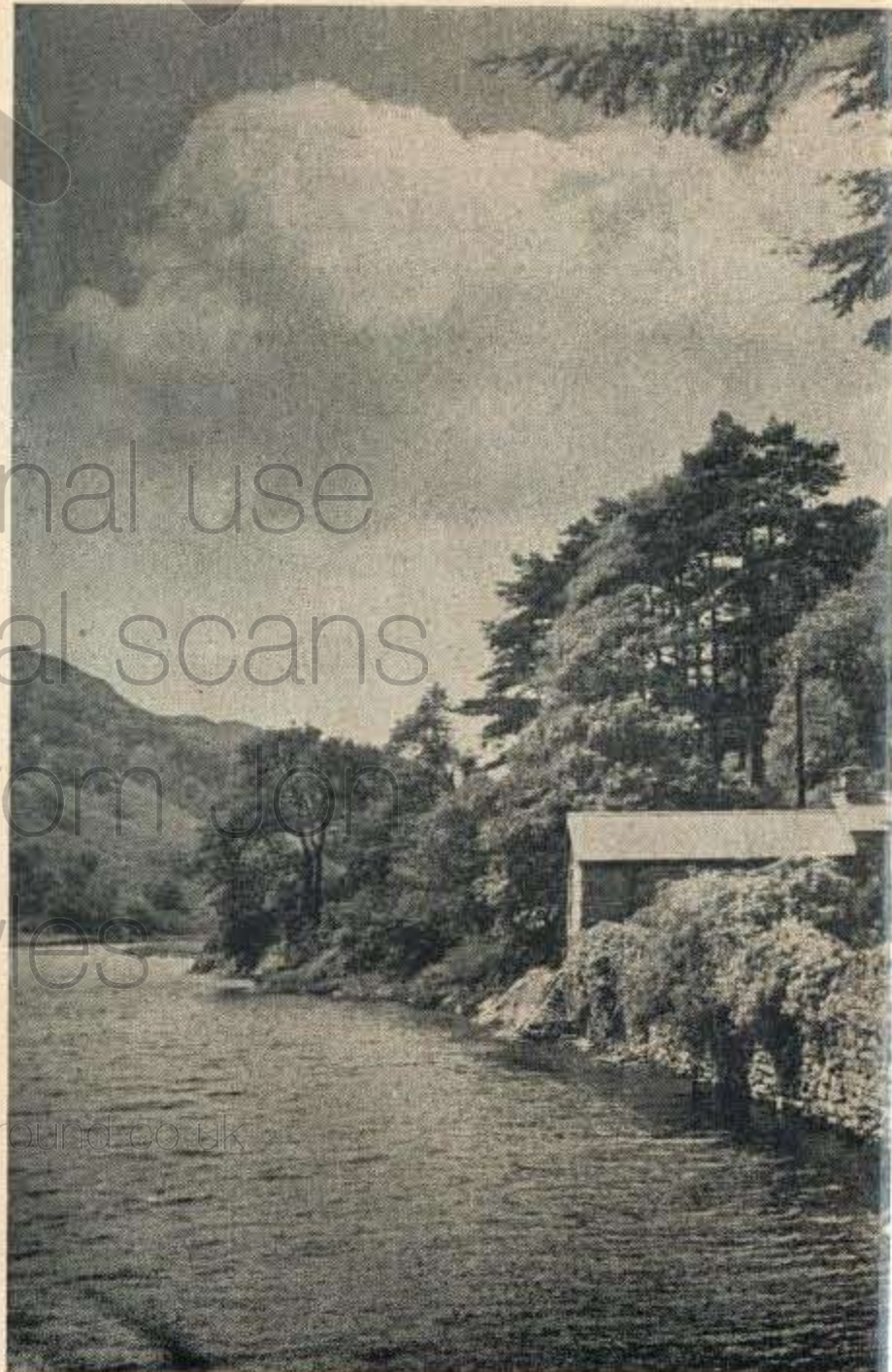
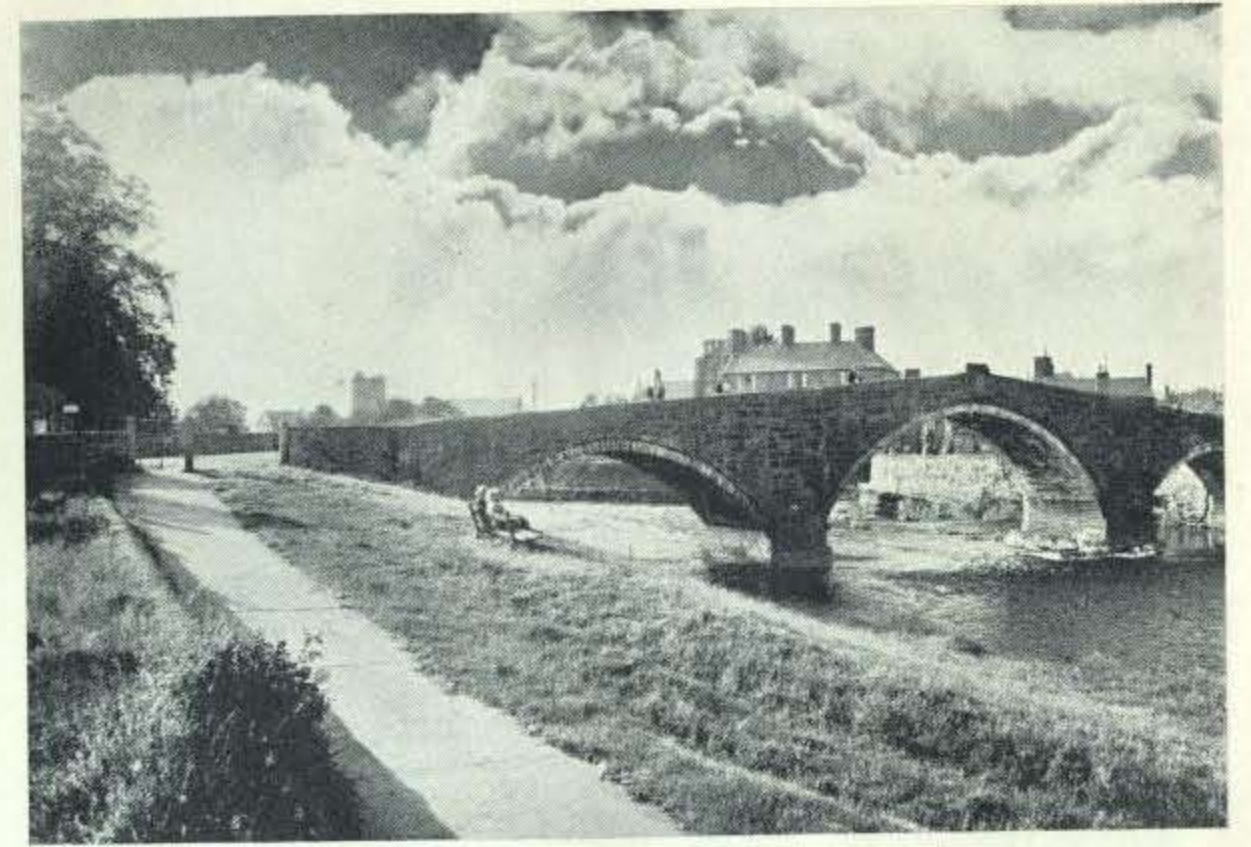
THE SUCCESS of the Quarry Club art exhibition last winter in which there was revealed a surprising wealth of natural talent among men whose day to day occupations at Oakeley or Votty are wholly unrelated to the delightful hobby of painting and sketching produced plenty of local and outside interest. It is to be hoped that the Club

will consider staging another exhibition of the quarrymen's art if only to underline proof that the tradition of culture, which has long been associated with the rank and file in our slate mines, and which for generations has been nurtured in discussion in the men's own cabins,



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remains constant and in surprising variety.

For the most part the quarrymen artists have a natural talent which they exploit purely for the joy and satisfaction of self-expression—a quality they share with the chief among our brilliant amateurs, Sir Winston Churchill. The Oakeley and Votty artists, however, find their subjects comparatively close at hand. A sketch book, and a bus ticket and the quarryman artist is almost immediately immersed in his pursuit of a new picture; one more for the humble family collection!

One such artist, chosen from random from the exhibitors at the club gallery, is Edgar Daniels, engaged as a platelayer

installing, re-arranging and repairing haulage tracks on the miles of floors underground at Oakeley.

Caban has followed in the artist's footsteps endeavouring to seek out as near as possible the actual settings of four pictures which caught the public's eye at the exhibition, to photograph them and compare the original scene with the impression in colour produced by the talented amateur artist.

The results proved striking and, as the illustrations show, the pilgrimage was worth while for, as Edgar Daniels first showed through his artist's eye, there are unsuspected vantage points and vignettes of real beauty to be discovered in the local area by all who trouble to indulge in a second glance.

NEWS EXCHANGE

Record turn-out at Oakeley-Votty Club Sports

OAKELEY AND VOTTY CLUB summer sports, held on the evening of July 21 last, was an event which will be recalled with real pleasure. In keeping with the record-breaking spell of sunshine which graced our part of the world throughout the month of July, there was a record attendance at the sports of club members, their families and friends, and a full entry of competitors and, because of all this, an atmosphere of carnival which all, young and older, enjoyed to the full.

Caban's special pictorial record of the evening in the sunshine tells its own tale of the thrills and enjoyment, particularly the happy hour or so spent by the children.

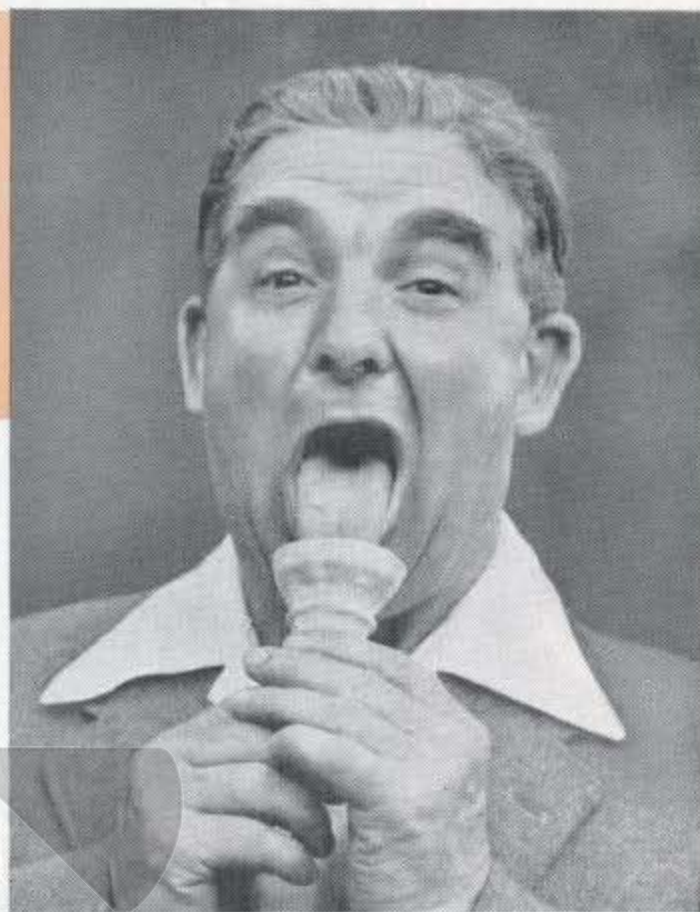
Keen Contests

The sporting events were keenly contested, juvenile participants showing all the enthusiasm of their elders. Some measure of that enthusiasm (as well as determination) has been caught in some of the special camera studies of Starter Richard Jones' young charges.

The going was good, but warm, though there was no complaining, for there was always the interval, an occasion for cooling refreshment dispensed by Mrs. Richard Jones and Mrs. Austin Jones.

Sports Queen Selected

An additional competitive item proving an immense success was the selection



Race starter "Dick" Jones

of the Oakeley and Votty Club Sports Queen. The choice was restricted to the daughters or sisters of employees at the Oakeley and Votty mines. Eight smiling young ladies competed for the honour.

The judges, Mrs. Thomas O. Thomas and Mrs. Thomas A. Owen, confessed to the difficulty of their task. Their choice—a popular one—was 12 year-old Olwen Jones, whose charm is matched by her modesty.

Framed in a bower of roses, Sports Queen Olwen is pictured on page 24.

The evening sky over the Moelwyns was still filled with the promise of yet another day of golden sunshine when the ice-cream stall closed down and the little ones were marshalled for the end of their happy hour.

Sports Results

30 yards, boys and girls (under 5): 1, Tony Hughes; 2, Kenneth Williams; 3, John Llewelyn.

50 yards, girls (under 8): 1, Menna W. Jones; 2, Glenys L. Jones; 3, Alwena Jones.

50 yards, boys (under 8): 1, D. Emlyn Griffiths; 2, Cledwyn Roberts; 3, Emlyn Jones.

60 yards, girls (under 12): 1, Roselyn Griffiths; 2, Lilian Roberts; 3, Helen Richards.

60 yards, boys (under 12): 1, Martin Williams; 2, Arthur Roberts; 3, Bobby J. Owen.

80 yards, girls (under 15): 1, Enid Mai Parry; 2, Glenys Jones; 3, Olwen Roberts.

80 yards, boys (under 15): 1, Jeffrey Roberts; 2, Elwyn Jones; 3, Kenneth Roberts.

100 yards, girls (15-18 years): 1, Meinir Wyn Jones; 2, Enid Mai Parry.

100 yards, boys (15-18 years): 1, Arwyn Jones; 2, Glyn Jones.

Half mile, boys (under 18): 1, Glyn Jones (2 mins. 36 secs.); 2, Hermon Jones.

Three-legged race, girls (12-15 years): 1, Glenys Jones and Roselyn Griffiths.

Three-legged, boys (12-15 years): 1, Kenneth Roberts and Elwyn Jones.

High jump, boys and girls (12-15 years): Gwyn Roberts (4ft. 3in.).

High jump, boys and girls (15-18 years): Gwyn Roberts (4ft. 10in.).

Special prize for highest aggregate of points, girl and boy (prizes awarded by Mr. Harry Cutts, Managing Director): Enid Mai Parry (5 points), Glyn Jones (9 points).

The sports officials were: Judges, Messrs. G. W. Humphreys, David G. Owen, John O. Williams and Idris Williams.

Starters, Richard Jones, Robert Thomas, Austin Jones, H. Lewis and John J. Williams. Announcers, John Edward Jones and W. H. Thomas. Ambulance, John Douglas Jones. Refreshments, Mrs. Richard Jones and Mrs. Austin Jones. The joint organising secretaries were Stanley Wyn Jones and L. Goodman.

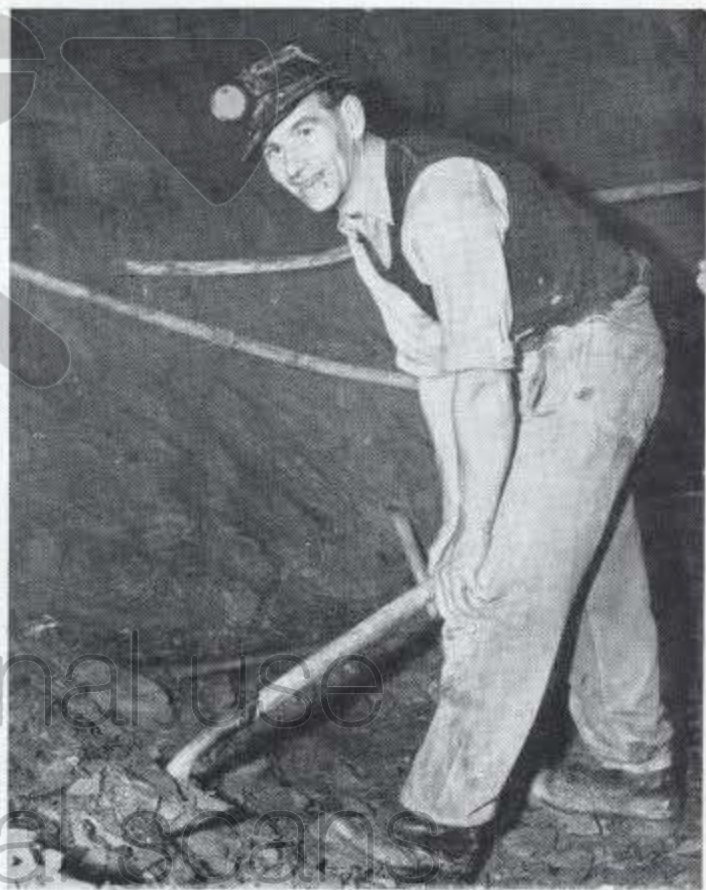
Whist Drive Results

Ladies: 1, Mrs. Jennie Roberts; 2, Mrs. M. A. Jones; 3, Miss Mair Davies. Gentlemen: 1, Peter Owen; 2, Dewi Lewis; 3, Mrs. Mary Donavon (playing as gentleman). Knock-out, Dewi Owen and Miss Mary E. Lewis. William R. Jones presided as M.C.

Votty Newcomer

Newcomer to Votty is Egon Majerski, former Polish Army lance-corporal, seen at work on I. Floor. He arrived in this country when the Polish Army disbanded in 1946, and has since worked as waiter, decorator, builder, and steel-worker. His wife is from Criccieth, and the family conversation at home, where there are two children, Andre, aged 7, and Astrid, aged 3, he says, might range through Welsh and English to Polish and German.

A member of the Polish Army Signal Corps, Egon Majerski took part in the



Egon Majerski

siege of Monte Casino, Italy. He was among the 800 survivors from the 2,000 Poles who took part in the assault of the lofty citadel. His hobbies are painting in oils and decorating.

Holiday 'Snaps' Contest

- 1, Anarawd Jones.
- 2, John Barlow.
- 3, John J. Williams.

Photographs will appear in the next issue of Caban.



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Votty dumper in action

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