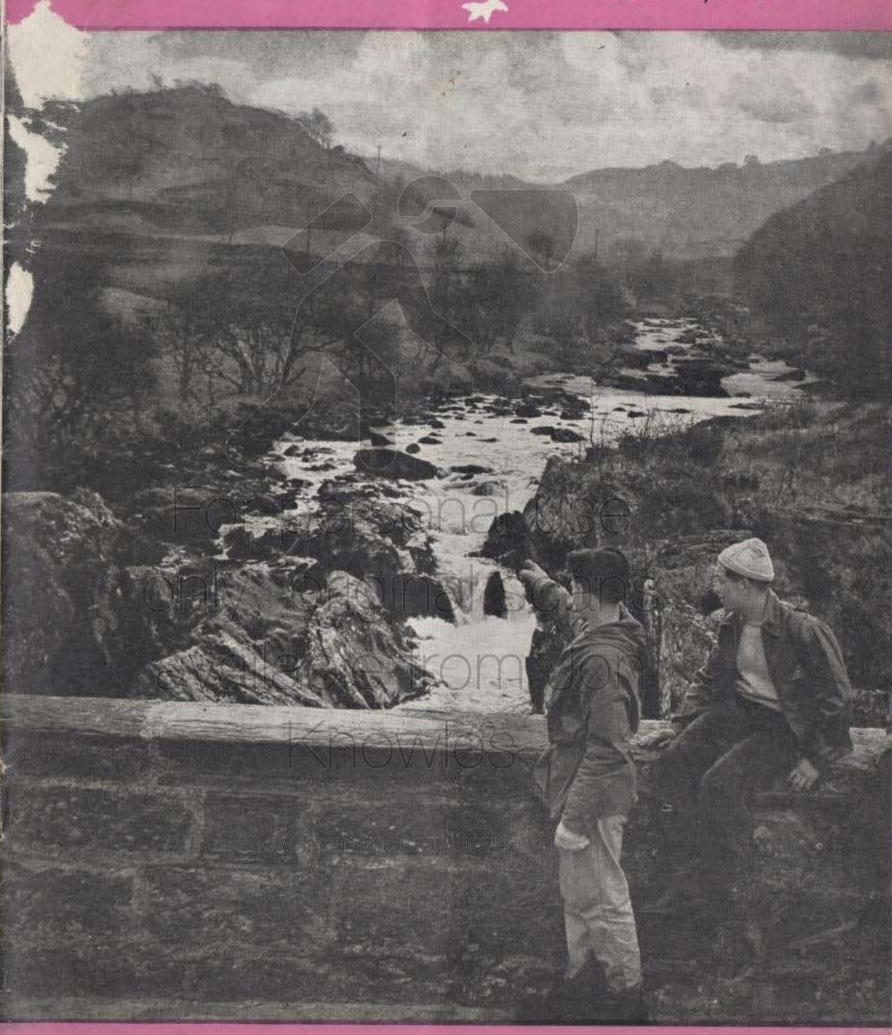
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE OAKELEY AND VOTTY SLATE QUARRIES

CABAN

THE OAKELEY SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,
THE VOTTY AND BOWYDD SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,
BLAENAU FFESTINIOG, NORTH WALES,
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LONDON, E.C.4

• FRONT COVER: Roadside view of the river Lledr looking westward in the direction of Blaenau Ffestining. "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

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ROOFING CONTRACTORS AT THE OAKELEY QUARRIES



On the K balance - going into the mine

who were attending the halfyearly meetings of the federation at Manager and provided with helmets
Llandudno, together with their ladies,
visited the Oakeley Quarry in May at the invitation of the Directors.

The party left Llandudge.

The party left Llandudno in glorious weather and made the journey to Blaenau

rockmen demonstrated for the visitors the technique of splitting a large block







of slate. Passing through more tunnels the party saw the approach to the lowest workings of the quarry. On returning to the surface, and after welcome refreshments kindly provided by the staff, the party visited the sheds to watch the splitting and sizing of the slates.

This account was contributed by Mr. A. K. Davidson of Leeds, secretary of the National Federation of Roofing Contractors.

Members were keenly interested in this aspect of the work, and some entered into competition for the splitting of the slates, although one felt that they would require a long apprenticeship before acquiring the knack of the regular workers.

Many of the ladies went away with a small slate as a souvenir.

The party proceeded to the Oakeley Arms Hotel, Maentwrog, where they were entertained to lunch by the chairman and members of the North Wales Slate Quarries Association. Mr. O. T. Williams welcomed the guests, and Mr. A. J. Burling, J.P., of Croydon, president of the federation, briefly thanked Mr. Williams and his colleagues for their excellent hospitality and for the welcome extended to the party.

The party returned to Llandudno feeling they had greatly benefited from the visit to the quarry and from seeing some of the lovely scenery of North Wales.



Equipped with safety belmets—the party photographed in front of the quarry office

Left, below: In an underground chamber rockmen demonstrate the cleavage of a massive block of slate

Below: Mr. Fordbam (right) explains a technical point to Mr. A. J. Burling

(More pictures on the next page)





Above: All smiles on the first stage of the journey into the mine Below: Concentrated attention on the activities of rockmen



Bird life in the quarry

By Kenneth Daniels

WHEN the men go home from the quarry at the end of the day's work people may think that all they leave behind them is a desert of grey rubble and a lifeless jungle of tips, inclines and battered waggons.

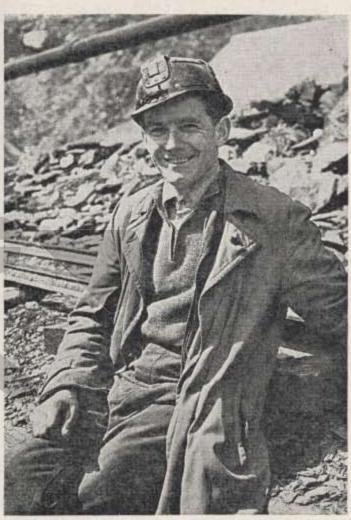
This is not quite true, as there is still some life in the quarry, "bird life," in which I take a great interest. They are, it is true, ordinary, everyday birds, but the amazing thing is that they choose to live amid the bustle and noise of a busy quarry.

We have our own Robin, with his favourite song-post on the wall of a disused building, and his burst of song can be very cheering in the gloom of a



cold winter morning. He sometimes wanders to the bottom of a steep shaft called the Trunk which leads into the heart of the quarry, and he always gets a warm welcome from the men and crumbs and titbits from their lunch boxes.

The House Sparrow, a common enough bird, in town and country, is equally at home in the quarry. The sparrows chirp and quarrel noisily on the beams in the carpenter's shop, where a bird table has been provided for them. It is slung from the beams and in it the men put scraps of food for their feath-



ered friends. Closed doors do not deter the sparrows; they manage to get in through gaps between doors and the ground.

Stalwarts

Sparrows and Robins are the stalwarts that brave snow, wind and rough weather in the highlands, but in the spring the bird colony is swollen by migrants which have spent the winter in warmer climes.

A pair of elegant Grey Wagtails return to nest behind some wooden shoring supporting loose rocks, and white rumped Wheatears can be seen back on the rubble tips after wintering in North Africa. A characteristic bird of the quarry is the Ring Ousel or Mountain Blackbird. It has a white crescent on the throat and builds a bulky nest

similar to that of the Blackbird behind a clump of heather or an old building. The Ring Ousel migrates in the autumn to the North African hills, but it usually rejoins us before March is out.

An uncommon visitor from the far North, a Snow Bunting, was with us during the winter of 1957-58.

Although many of the smaller birds have accepted man as their friend not so the larger predatory birds.

Other large birds which visit us are the powerful Peregrine Falcon and Curlews and Choughs, the latter an uncommon bird about the size of a Jackdaw and as black, but with vivid red beak and legs.

Ravens, too, nest near us, but of course in inaccessible places on the cliffs. They nest in February and I have seen a pair struggling to carry sticks and nesting material through a raging blizzard.



remain wary and aloof. A pair of Carrion Crows often perch on the cliff towering over the "fall," and when I throw some crusts on the roof of a nearby building they never venture near it while there is anyone about.

When the hooter sounds at the end of the lunch break I have often paused and watched and it is only when the



PEREGRINE FALCON

In these notes I have mentioned only a few of the birds that bring life and song to the greyness of a slate quarry.



last man has disappeared that the Crows ound, co.uk venture to take the food.

Carrion Crows normally nest in trees, but in the quarry they build their bulky nest of sticks on a secure ledge high on the cliff.

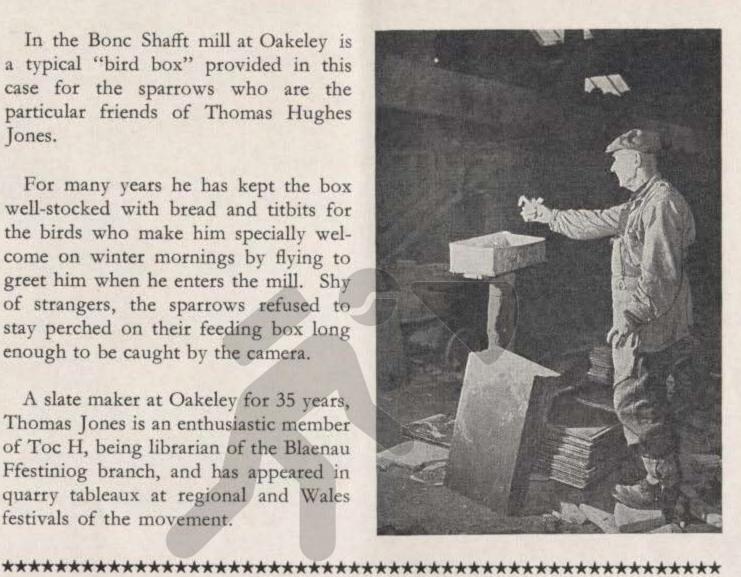
lowlands our bird list is short but I believe that our birds are more appreciated because they condescend to share with us the hardier conditions of the highland.

SPARROWS ARE HIS FRIENDS!

In the Bonc Shafft mill at Oakeley is a typical "bird box" provided in this case for the sparrows who are the particular friends of Thomas Hughes Jones.

For many years he has kept the box well-stocked with bread and titbits for the birds who make him specially welcome on winter mornings by flying to greet him when he enters the mill. Shy of strangers, the sparrows refused to stay perched on their feeding box long enough to be caught by the camera.

A slate maker at Oakeley for 35 years, Thomas Jones is an enthusiastic member of Toc H, being librarian of the Blaenau Ffestiniog branch, and has appeared in quarry tableaux at regional and Wales festivals of the movement.



Studies in Expression

CABAN MAWR, VOTTY

Our "Studies in Expression" in the following two pages come from the Votty Quarry and the subjects are the men who work in the New Mill and meet at "Caban Mawr"—the "Big Caban." Chairman of the caban is Howell Williams, and the secretary Ieuan Jones.

In the first set of snapshots are:

Top: W. J. Roberts.

Second row (from left): I. Ll. Jones, W. E. Evans, Ieuan E. Jones.

Third: R. D. Jones, Harry Williams, R. O. Roberts.

Fourth: G. Thomas, E. J. Williams, R. I. Williams.

Second set first row: J. B. Williams, Tom Jones, G. J. Williams.

www.train4undergecond row John Williams, O. G. Lloyd, R. L. Hughes.

> Third: Evan P. Jones, Howell Williams, Thomas Hughes.

> Fourth: Trevor Davies, Vincent Jones, T. A. Owen.

SNAPSHOTS IN CABAN MAWR VOTTY

























This relic of the "steam age" at Oakeley-a Kidbrooke locomotivestands forgotten by the quarrymen but it is frequently the object of inquiry by light railway enthusiasts who learn of its existence through devious channels! The Kidbrooke was last in active use some 25 years ago.

Old but not forgotten! Television film Oakeley

ELEVISION audiences had the opportunity this year for the first time of seeing men at work in the Oakeley mine. Slatewinning operations in the underground chambers and tunnels were filmed by the B.B.C.'s Welsh Region film unit under the direction of producer Elwyn Thomas.

The team spent several days at the quarry. They made a record of the whole process of slate quarrying for inclusion in a programme dealing with the potentialities of this area of Merionethshire.

In this page are scenes pictured from the television screen by Caban photographer during an interesting programme about Ffestiniog broadcast in the regional Children's Hour in May. quarrymen who were televised may recognise themselves!

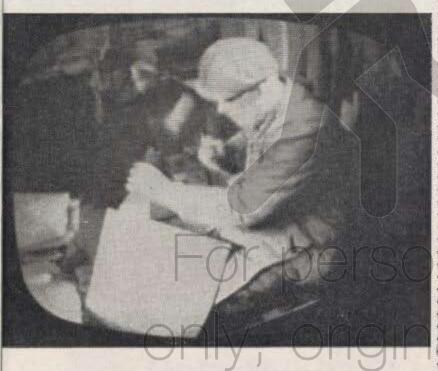
WWW.

The B.B.C. film unit in an underground chamber



Cameras at







A brilliant summer

On previous occasions we have had cause to refer to the hazards of heavy rain in the hills around our quarries, and it is a pleasant change this year to note that Blaenau Ffestiniog has enjoyed its share of the fine summer. Although somewhat surprisingly July produced nearly 9 inches of rain, measured on the quarry gauge at the 1,200 feet level, the total rainfall for the first eight months of this year at 42.75 inches, was some 22 inches less than that for the comparable period of 1958.

In August there was only 1.60 inches of rain, slightly less than in May which is usually one of the driest months. Of course, anything can happen in August, which is so notoriously uncertain in its weather, for we find in the Oakeley records such extreme contrasts as 17 inches of rain in August, 1956, and only .37 inches for that month in 1947.

But as might be expected at the high elevation of the Oakeley Quarry, there is never a month without some rainfall; and sunshine figures, if they were available, would perhaps be more indicative of the glorious summer of 1959.

Gift to choir

HE Oakeley Male Voice Choir were pleased to receive from the members of the Y.M.C.A. at St. Helens in April, a casket containing a baton as a token of the association's appreciation of the services given to them by the choir on a number of occasions. Both casket and baton had been made by Y.M.C.A. members, and the red velvet lining of the casket bore an embroidered replica of the choir's badge. The presentation was made during a service at the Y.M.C.A. chapel and at a concert which followed the conductor of the choir, Mrs. George Ellis, was presented by Mrs. Roberts of St. Helens, with a baton which had been won by her late husband at a Caernaryon eisteddfod.

CRAZY PAVING AND ALL THAT

CAWN ends! Not an inspiring term perhaps, yet it is remarkable what attractive uses these remainders of slate blocks can be put.

Crazy paving, for example. And in this connection we would mention the sentimental wish of a Welsh-American which was fulfilled by a consignment of these inexpensive and unsymetrical pieces of slate.

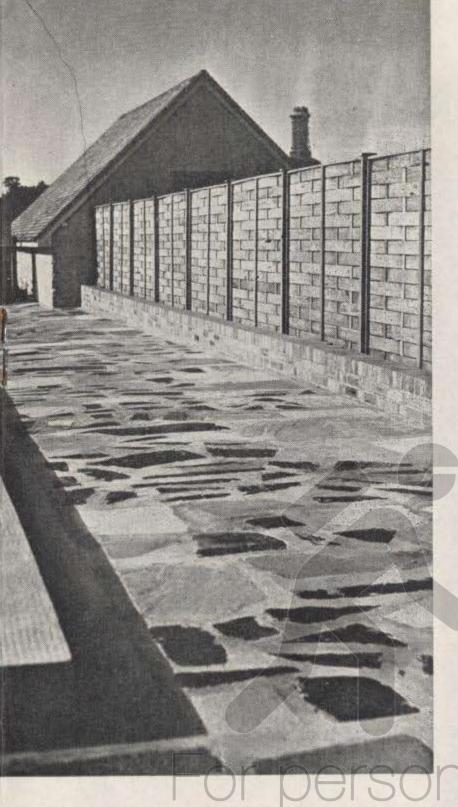
Thousands of miles away in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., Mr. David L. Davies felt an overwhelming desire to "feel Welsh rock under his feet," and decided that the way to satisfy it was to lay down in his garden crazy paving formed of slate from Wales.

So from Oakeley recently a 3-ton truckload of selected sawn ends, split to the thickness specified by Mr. Davies, was despatched to a city near the Pacific coast of the United States. Transportation involved some complicated routing and cost a good deal more than the price of the slate, but we like to think that there is one Welsh "exile" who when he takes a turn in his garden can more easily recapture the "feeling" of the rugged hills of his native land.

Coming much nearer home, there is an increasing demand











Above: Swimming pool at Rydal School.

Left: Oakeley war memorial.

Top right: Slate walling of the Oakeley office

Below: Loading sawn ends,

This work was carried out by a Colwyn Bay contractor, Mr. J. Goodband, who informs us that he has already carried out some twenty contracts for crazy paving in the Colwyn Bay area in which slate blocks have been extensively used.

Surplus slate in the form of sawn ends has also proved most useful in building construction. Such material was used for the main office at Oakeley as well as the power station and many other buildings. Outside the quarry precincts an attractive example of the use of these small blocks is to be found by the side of the main road to Blaenau Ffestiniog where the Oakeley War Memorial, a single column of slate, is protected by slate-block walling.

A GEOLOGICAL SIDELIGHT

N a day when the rock glistened with rain the "whinstone dykes"igneous rock containing a good deal of quartzite which gives it its light colour—stood out prominently in the "peak" district of Oakeley's DE Floor and Caban saw in it an interesting illustration of the slate formation. Hence the picture opposite.

These dykes, which intrude into the slate beds, traverse the length and depth of the workings, extending horizontally along the strike (roughly from east to west) for well over a mile, and dipping into the ground at varying angles right into the lowest workings.

The "Hards"

The angle of the dip of these dykes, or "hards," as they are called, varies between 25 and 40 degrees, and they, together with the other "hard" called a chert, generally form the secure roofs of the tunnels in the mine as well as of the chambers from which the slate is excavated. The distance measured from north to south between these hards usually decides, underground, whether an attempt to win the slate should be made or not.

The accompanying drawing is of a geological section of the mine, and corresponds to the photographic illustration of the rock in the "peak" district. The "peak" is so called because a rock spur once rose from the floor of the DE level, which is still identified by the quarrymen as "Y Ceiliog."

GLANCE BACK

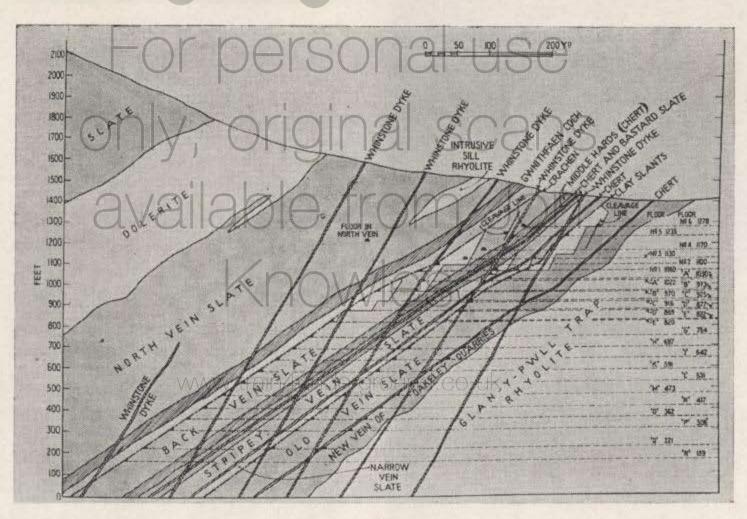


Row upon row of tightly packed slates . . . tall masted ships waiting to transport them to ports at home and overseas. This scene on the wharf at Portmadoc will bring back

to older quarrymen memories of the days when slates were sent down to the sea on the "Lein Bach," the Ffestiniog narrow-gauge railway.

Mr. J. G Ashmore, who was general manager of the Oakeley quarries at the time, is seen on the left, and with him is David Morris, wharf manager.





CABAN CALLS ON

CABAN has been looking up some of our pensioners, the "boys of the old brigade" who are living in well-earned retirement after spending their working lives with slate.

A number of them are in their 80's and still quite active, which goes to show that longevity is as much a characteristic of quarrying as of other industries.

Outside their homes the pensioners find companionship in another caban, the "Old People's Caban" in Blaenau Ffestiniog, where several retired quarrymen gather to talk over old times and about current topics, play games and listen to the radio. Being mostly of the same generation they have a great deal in common and derive much pleasure and enjoyment from their daily meetings.

Doyen of these pensioners perhaps is Mr. Owen Roberts of Wynne Road,



Mr. Owen Roberts



Mr. O. A. Jones

Blaenau Ffestiniog, who is 85 in August. He retired 18 years ago after working at Oakeley and Votty for 34 years, but returned to Votty to serve as a watchman for four years during the last war. Enjoying excellent health he still does a turn in the garden and is one of the "regulars" at the town caban. A pillar of Ebenezer Welsh Methodist Church, he loves to read biographies and sermons of the great Welsh preachers of the past. Then there is Mr. Owen Arthog Jones, who worked for 60 years at Oakeley and Votty and whose services to the town and people of Blaenau Ffestiniog over a long period, especially as councillor and a member of the hospital committee, are widely known. Now 79, he retired six years ago and having given up his public work enjoys the relaxation and comfort of his home at Dolwar, Cwmbowydd Road.

THE PENSIONERS



Mr. R. O. Jones

Another octogenarian he is 82 is Mr. Robert Q. Jones of 15 Glynllifon Street, Blaenau Ffestiniog, who left Oakeley at the age of 72 after having worked there for 60 years except for his spell of service during the first world war. Until recently he used to do "a little bit of gardening," and has been an enthusiastic member of the Ffestiniog Pensioners Choir.

The Oakeley Male Voice Choir is the absorbing interest of Mr. David Lewis,

aged 71, of 5 Benar View, who spent his working life at Oakeley. Proud to be the "senior member" of the choir, he never misses a practice or a concert engagement wherever it might be. Walking is another of his pleasures, and no one knows the countryside around Blaenau Ffestiniog better than Mr. Lewis. Two sons of his, Herbert and Dewi, work at Oakeley.

A near neighbour of Mr. Lewis is Mr. Isaac Morgan of 20 Fron Fawr, Blaenau Ffestiniog, who retired from Oakeley after 46 years, most of which he worked as rockman in O.9. He is a keen follower of bowls and on summer days is often to be found around the green in the town square.

Mr. David Lewis (left) and Mr. Isaac Morgan



NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD EXHIBITION

In an "Industries, old and new" exhibition staged during the National Eisteddfod at Caernarvon in August our quarries were represented by a selection of enlargements of photo-

graphs which have appeared in Caban illustrating the process of slate production underground and in the mills and by a couple of the well known slate "fans."

PARTING GIFT TO VOTTY INSPECTOR

STAFF and quarrymen at Votty and the staffs of the Despatch Office and Wharf joined in giving a clock to R. J. Pritchard on his retirement in July after 36 years with our Company, 30 of which he served as a slate inspector at Votty. Our picture illustrates the occasion in the Votty mill when the presentation was made by D. G. Griffiths, the wharf manager.

A feature of the ceremony was the poetic contribution by R. J. Roberts of Liverpool, well known in bardic circles as Bob John Tan'rallt, who worked for many years as a loader under the supervision of R. J. Pritchard. His specially composed "englynion" were read by Howell Williams, who also spoke on behalf of the surface workers.

men were extended by William Madoc

Jones, and those of the staff by Emlyn Jones, Votty manager. Slate-maker Richard David Jones presided, and Ieuan Jones expressed the thanks of all who had contributed to the occasion and everybody's hopes for the future health and happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard.

A popular figure at Votty, R. J. Pritchard has taken a prominent part in the social and particularly the musical life of the locality and in his younger days had the reputation of being one of the finest wing-halves in Welsh League football. He had played for his home town, Blaenau Ffestiniog, and also Portmadoc, Barmouth and Aberystwyth, among other clubs, and still takes the keenest interest in soccer and sport The good wishes of the underground in general. He remains a sprightly

Ornamental slating

lend slates impart an unexpected touch in so ordinary a building as the electricity sub-station at Oakeley's Middle Quarry, but not many examples of this ornamental style are to be found today.

Shaped slates, for which apparently no names were coined comparable with "duchesses" and "countesses" by which some of the traditional roofing types have been known, were specialities some 50 years ago. Other instances of the use of the style by our Company are to be seen at Portmadoc, at the former quarry shipping office as well as a nearby cot-tage. The chimneys of both buildings are also faced with slate.

So much extra cutting and dressing is entailed in the production of diamond and rounded slates that the ornamental effect illustrated would be costly to

IAMOND shaped and rounded- adopt today, distinctive though it may

A style which enjoyed a much greater vogue was plain "hung" slating and there exist many buildings in the locality and elsewhere in which the gable ends have been "hung" with ordinary roofing slate. This method had the advantage of affording more efficient protection from the rain.



Tragedy

TT is with deep regret that we refer Lto Judith Jones, the "Slate Queen" of Blaenau Ffestiniog, who lost her life in a bathing accident on a sunny day in July. Judith, who was 12 years of age, was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Gwilym Jones - he is a slatemaker at Oakeley-and our sense of tragedy is all the greater when we remember the charming picture she made at her crowning as "Slate Queen" last year and the photographs of her which appeared in the previous issue of Caban. We sympathise deeply with Mr. and Mrs. John Gwilym Jones in their sorrow.



From "Down Under"

R. William R. Williams, who worked as a rockman at Oakeley for nine years up to 1948 and left for Australia two years later, was back home this summer renewing acquaintanceships and attending the National Eisteddfod at Caernarvon.

Now 73, Mr. Williams told Caban that when he contemplated a visit to Australia to stay with his daughter in



North Queensland his doctor advised him "it would do him good so long as he did not work." But he felt so much better "in the grand climate of the most beautiful part of Australia" that within two months of his arrival he had got himself a job.

For eight years until last Christmas he worked in the laboratory of the sugar mill where his son-in-law, Mr. Martin Young is an engineer, and never once looked at a medicine bottle.

He lived within a few miles of the Great Barrier Reef, one of Australia's famous tourist sights, and brought back with him as a souvenir a piece of the many-coloured coral which is a feature of the reef.

Mr. Williams, who joined the Welsh "exiles" greeted at the National Eisteddfod, is staying with his daughter, Mrs. William Jones at Tanygrisiau, and when Caban photographed him he was undecided whether to go back "down under."

Between

Happy to be back

TWO of our young quarrymen, Ellis Gwynfryn Edwards and Dewi Wyn Owen, have been welcomed back by their colleagues at Oakeley after having been away for two years doing their turn of National Service.

Both were in the Army and served for 20 months in Germany. Gwynfryn, 22



Ellis Gwynfryn Edwards

year old fitter at Oakeley, was with the R.A.S.C. in Munster and Osnabruck. His duties included a good deal of lorry driving on manoeuvres, and in this way he saw much of the country. Dewi, who is 21, and a slatemaker, served as a driver

Ourselves

in the Royal Artillery, mainly in Essen and Lipstadt.

Both told Caban that they found their experiences in the Army and in Germany very interesting but unsensational and were happy to be back at Oakeley.



Dewi Wyn Owen

"He was young in heart with a cheerful outlook on life and no one could long feel depressed in his company"—so said a colleague of him. The measure of Humphrey Lewis' popularity at Votty was shown by the very generous way in which staff and quarrymen subscribed for a retirement gift to him, which was presented by Richard David Jones on their behalf privately at his home before he died.

A Votty personality

A POPULAR personality at Votty, Humphrey Lewis, died in March at the age of 66, a few weeks after his retirement, having served our Company for half a century as a slatemaker at Oakeley and Votty.

A cultured, cheerful and kindly man, Humphrey Lewis will be particularly



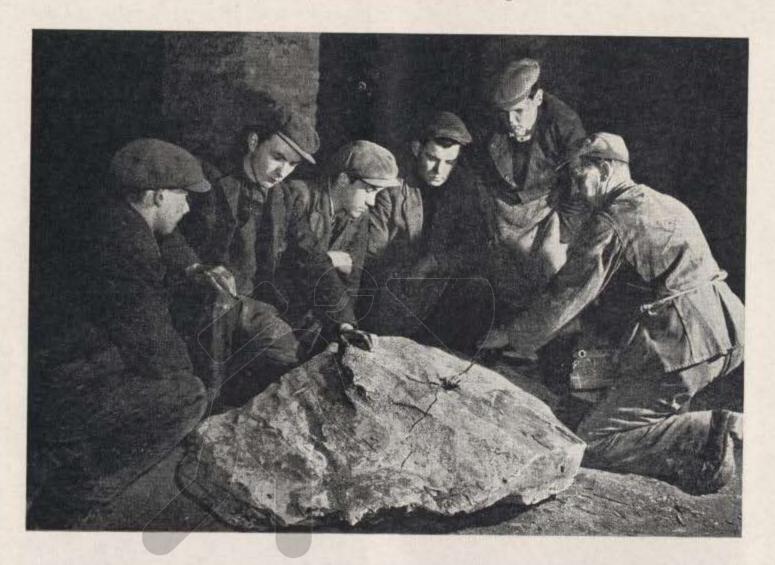
missed at the Oakeley Club of which he was a vice-president. He worked untiringly for its wellbeing and took a leading part in its activities. The children will remember him as "the life and soul" of their annual parties. His interest in young people also found an outlet at the quarry, where he was responsible for the training of apprentice slatemakers.

A keen musician, fond of the classics, he was an accomplished clarinetist, and had played in local orchestras. His love of music has been inherited by his son, Ifan, who plays the clarinet in the Welsh Guards Band.

(Continued in previous column)

Between Ourselves (Continued)

Craftsmen in the making



David Griffith Owen (right) a slatemaker at Oakeley for 37 years, this newest group of apprentices at the Middle Quarry are being shown how to deal with a block of slate delivered from the mine. The boys, all school-leavers from Ysgol Sir Ffestiniog, are (from left) David Wyn Hughes, aged 15, Richard Davies (16), David Brynmor Williams (15), David Griffith Williams (15) and James Alan Roberts (15).

On the right is the newest recruit, Geraint Roberts, aged 16, who became an apprentice slatemaker after the photograph of the group was taken.



Weddings





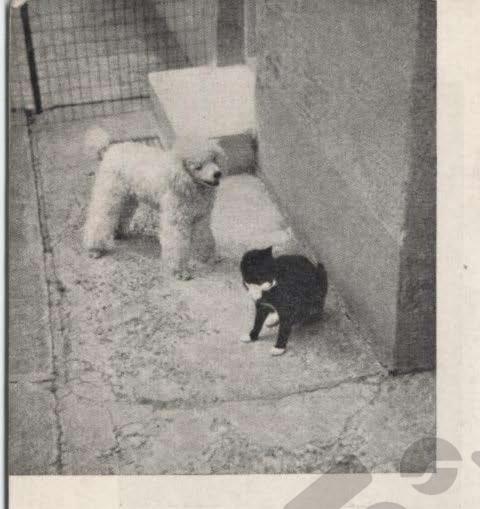
Eryl Davies, joiner at Votty, and Miss Eurwen Davies, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Idwal Davies of Blaenau Ffestiniog, who were married in March at the Baptist Chapel, Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Miss Nesta Jones, elder daughter of Mr. Emlyn Jones, manager of our Votty Quarry, and Mrs. Jones, was married at Bethesda Welsh Presbyterian Chapel, Manod, Blaenau Ffestiniog, on August 8th, to Mr. Alwyn Pritchard Evans, younger son of Mrs. Evans and the late Alderman Gwilym Evans, Awelon, Ffestiniog. The bride was attended by her sister, Miss Gwenda M. Jones, and the best man was Mr. Meurig Evans, Llanberis, the bridegroom's brother.

RIGHT

John Edwin Hughes, a rockman at Oakeley, and Miss Ella Margaret Jones, the district nurse at Blaenau Ffestiniog, after their wedding at Ebenezer Methodist Chapel, Blaenau Ffestiniog. The bride is the daughter of Mrs. Jones and the late Mr. J. Jones, Erw Fryn, Ffestiniog.



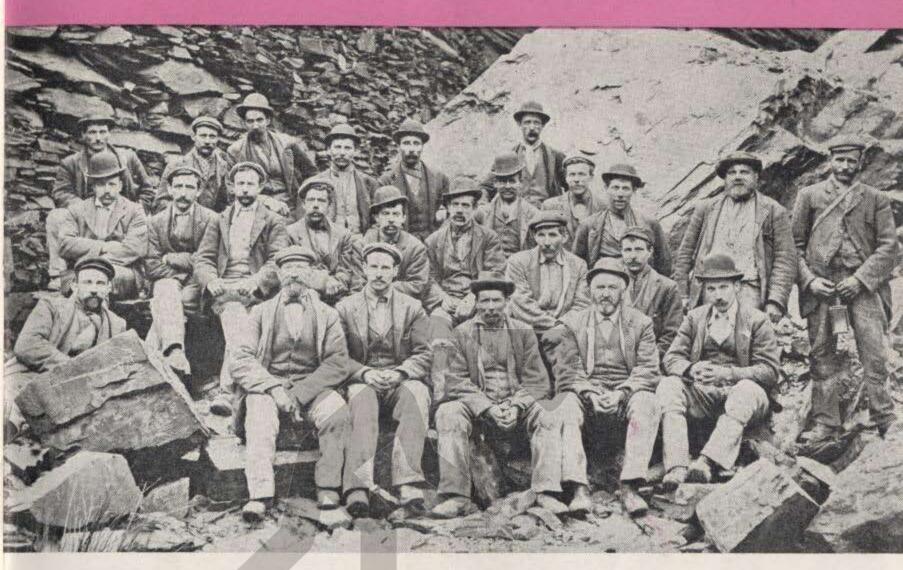


Holiday snaps competition

THREE prizes are awarded in our 1959 Holiday Snaps Competition and this year again all go to Oakeley men. A delightful "black and white" animal study earns the first prize for Jeff. J. Osborne, and the second is awarded to John J. Williams for his photograph of Conway harbour, a scene which attracts thousands of holidaymakers in the summer. Third prize goes to D. G. Owen who found his subject in the charm of a typical Welsh country lane.



Bowler-hatted and moustached



Safety helmets have long been the rule but bowlers were once popular as may be seen from this photograph, the date of which is uncertain. Lent by Oakeley rockman J. D. Roberts, it was among several old records which belonged to his grandfather, Robert Roberts, for many years a rockman at Votty.

Identification of the group is far from complete but here are some names: First row, first left: Evan Williams (Glyn Myfyr); third, Edward Stoddart; fourth, Tom Rowlands. Second row: first, Edward Edwards (afterwards an undermanager); second, Pierce Williams; fourth, John Parry; fifth, Owen Edwards; sixth, John Gwilym Jones. Standing: first, John Edwards; fifth, Owen Parry; eighth, Lewis Jones.

VICE-PRESIDENT

A SLATE-MAKER at the Oakeley
Quarry, David Griffith Owen, has
been elected a vice-president of the
Oakeley Club in succession to the late
Humphrey Lewis.

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PROMOTION

After having been a slate-maker at Votty for some 30 years, R. Oliver Roberts has been appointed slate inspector to succeed R. J. Pritchard, who retired recently.

BACK COVER

The mill at Bonc Goedan, Oakeley, is the subject of our back cover picture which shows the slatemakers dealing with the blocks of slate sent up from the mine by their rockman partners.



Bonc Goedan Mill

CABAN is the magazine of the Oakeley Slate Quarries Cc Lta., of Mitre Court Chambers, Old Mitre Court, (off Fleet Street), London, E.C.4 and its associated company, The Votty and Bowydd Slate Quarries Co. Ltd.