

# CABAN

SEPTEMBER, 1956



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*THE MAGAZINE OF THE OAKELEY AND VOTTY SLATE QUARRIES*



# CABAN

THE OAKELEY SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,  
THE VOTTY AND BOWYDD SLATE QUARRIES CO. LTD.,  
BLAENAU FFESTINIOG, NORTH WALES,  
4 OLD MITRE COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

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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 : Vale of Ffestiniog from Plas Tan-y-Bwlch.*

● *Below : Oakeley Quarries from the slopes of Allt Fawr.*

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# ***"Grand Old Lady" of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch***

**T**HE name of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch, the lovely old mansion standing on the northern slopes of the Vale of Ffestiniog, has become synonymous with that of Oakeley for it has been the home of members of the Oakeley family since the latter part of the eighteenth century.

A long time ago the mansion was known as Bwlch Coed Dyffryn, and today people who pass through the green and wooded valley running from the mountainous region of Ffestiniog to the estuary of the Dwyryd River cannot fail to notice the big stone-built house among the trees, surrounded in season by masses of colourful flowering shrubs with rhododendrons in a multitude of tones making an especially eye-catching display in early summer.

## ***Panorama***

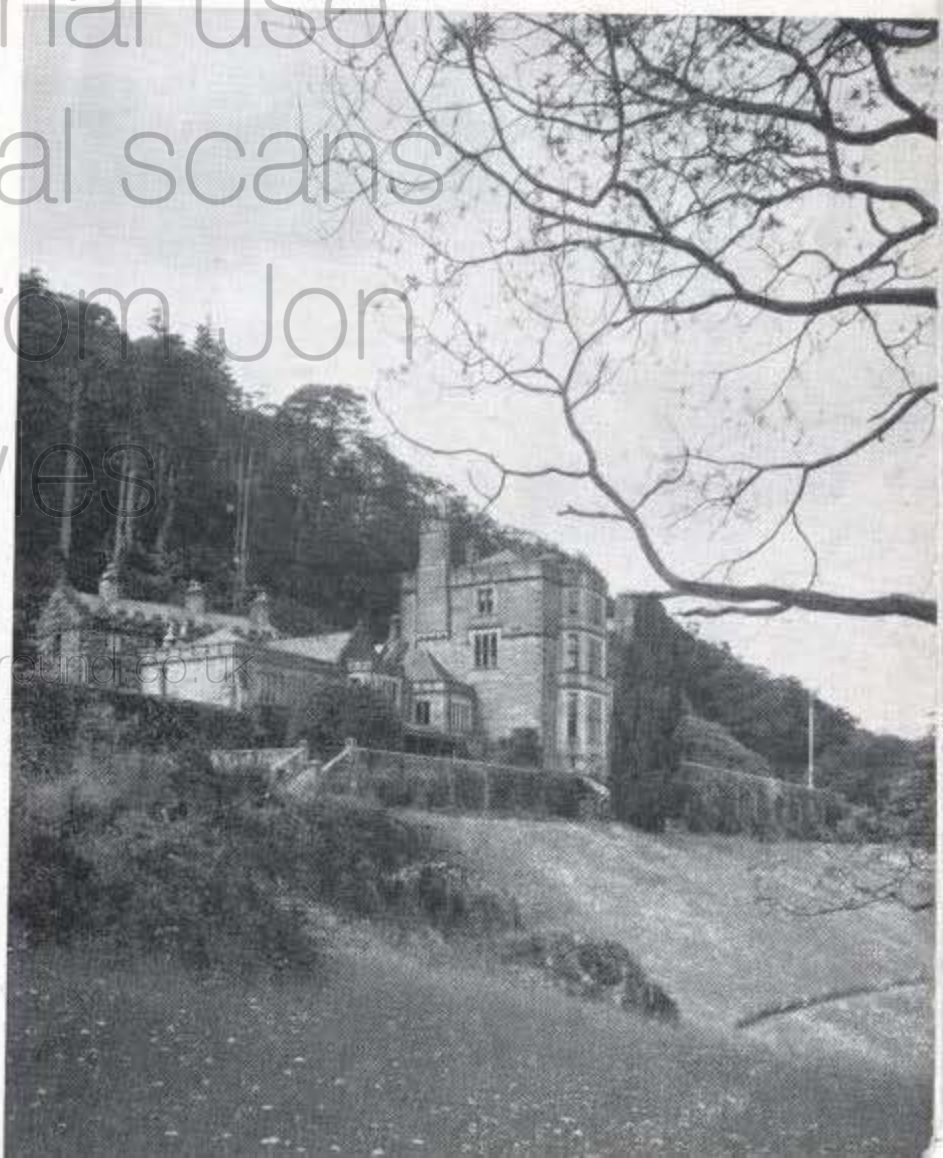
One of the most delightful features of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch is its terrace overlooking the lawns which slope steeply down to the river. Its elevated position commands a unique panoramic view of the valley, of the ascending hills to the east and the village of Maentwrog nestling at their feet.

Plas Tan-y-Bwlch is the home of Mrs. Inge, daughter of the late Mr. W. E. Oakeley, and granddaughter of William Griffith Oakeley, founder of Oakeley Quarries.

Mrs. Inge will be celebrating her ninety-first birthday in November and *Caban* was privileged to take special pre-birthday photographs of her in her favourite chair in the library, and on the terrace, where she delights to walk with "Chong," the Pekingese, which is her constant companion.

Mrs. Inge, who is wonderfully alert and active despite her years, is as proud of her Welsh connections as she is of the antiquity of the Oakeley ancestry, and while being photographed she talked animatedly about the "Plas" and its many interesting features.

*The "Plas" from the grounds*







*Mrs. Inge in the library*

Long though the association of the Oakeleys with Plas Tan-y-Bwlch is, the history of the old place is lost in the mists of time.

The record is somewhat sketchy, but according to local lore a house stood on the site as far back as the year 1100 in the time of the Welsh princes. The estate passed into the Oakeley family when, in 1798, Margaret, the only daughter of Evan Griffith of Tan-y-Bwlch, married William Oakeley.

At one time, almost opposite the house, were five slate wharves, traces of at least one of which are still visible. Small boats used to sail into the valley to pick up cargoes of slates, brought down from the quarries in pony and

donkey carts, often by farmers, and transport them down the estuary for transfer to sea-going vessels.

#### *In 1400*

Such was the method of carrying slates until the "Lein Bach"—the Ffestiniog Railway—was built, the first stone of which was laid in 1833 by William Griffith Oakeley, William Oakeley's son.

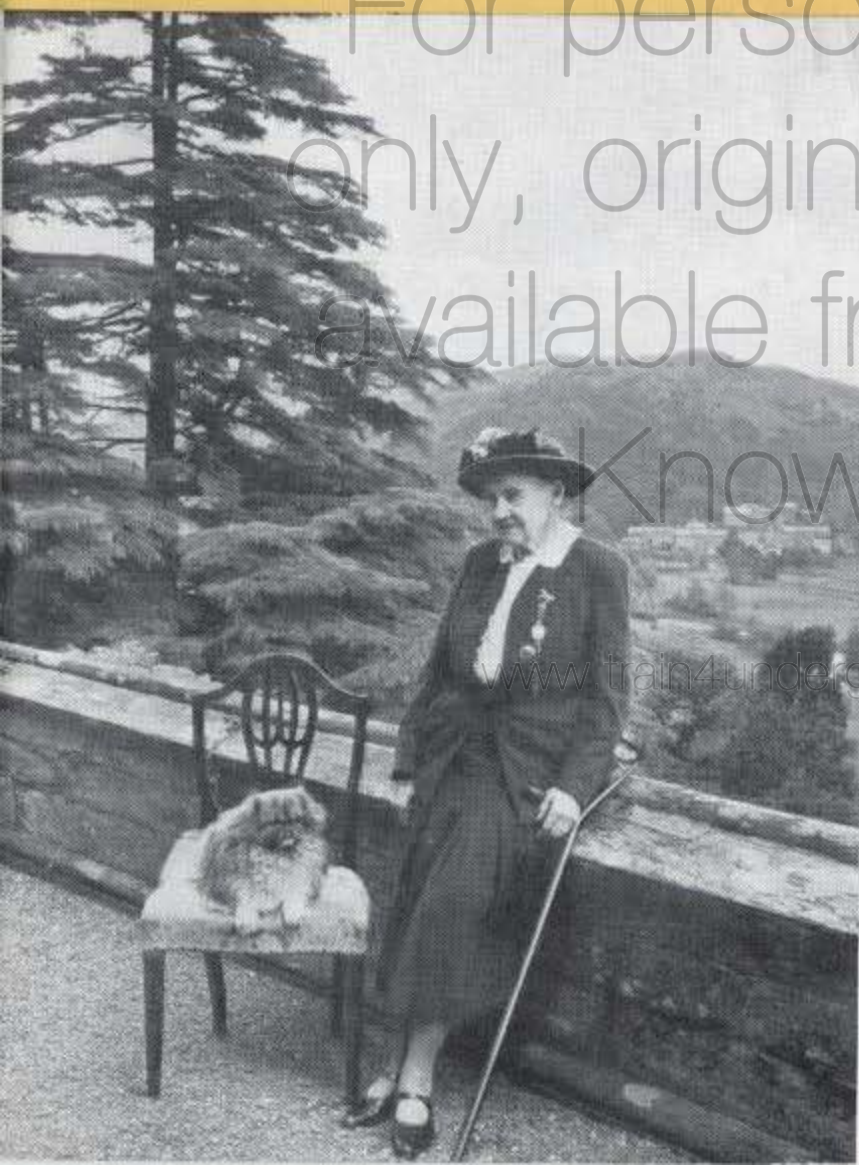
Mrs. Inge believes that the oldest part of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch—the building at the rear referred to as the "Old House"—was probably built about the year 1400. It would appear that the terrace was standing in early 1600, the





Gateway to the courtyard

On the terrace



stables then being located underneath it.

In the handsome oak-panelled library of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch, and in the equally attractive dining room, is to be found Mrs. Inge's artistic touch. For example, ornamental carvings on several pieces of oak furniture were executed to her design, and she told *Caban* the actual carving was done by her mother.

### Carvings

Distinctive items of furniture in the dining room include a sideboard on which is carved in relief an elaborate tableau depicting a crowd scene at Epsom racecourse. This painstaking work, with its many figures fashioned out of the solid oak, is attributed to a joiner's apprentice. A similar relief carving of an otter hunt is to be seen above the fireplace, and there is also an exquisitely carved table which is supposed to have been brought from the Valle Crucis Abbey or Cymer Abbey, near Dolgelley.

The terrace is entered from the main courtyard through artistic wrought iron gates of Italian workmanship which are to be seen in one of the photographs in these pages. Mrs. Inge is naturally intensely proud of the beautiful "Plas." She was first introduced to it at the tender age of two years and has lived there for varying periods over the best part of a century.

*Caban* takes this opportunity of extending to Mrs. Inge every good wish for the ninety-first anniversary of her birthday—and many happy returns of the day.



## Rendezvous in America

**M**R. IVOR Ll. Thomas, well known to many of our readers as the Oakeley Wharf manager for many years until he retired recently, tells us of his trip last year to America to visit his brother and other relations and friends. He certainly thoroughly enjoyed himself.

Mr. Thomas travelled out by the new Cunard liner "Saxonia" to Montreal, a roughish passage, enlivened by icebergs off the Nova Scotian coast, which nevertheless did not interfere with his appetite! The journey to Detroit was completed by train.

### *Fabulous Fair*

Life in Blaenau had not prepared him for the mid-summer heat there, and he was nearly overcome when the thermometer reached 105 degrees. However, after buying lighter clothing Mr. Thomas seems to have moved around a great deal, with trips by river and to the Great Lakes, through the Ford and other motor factories, and visiting the fabulous Michigan State Fair (cowboys and Indians and everything else).

One of the trips from Detroit took Mr. Thomas to the Adirondacks, thickly forested mountains with many lovely lakes where one could escape the terrific heat. On the way back he was able to stop at Granville, where his elder broth-



*Mr. Ivor Thomas*

er once worked in the slate quarries and where many Blaenau people have relatives. He was sorry only to have time to visit one quarry, where a few men were producing small slabs.

The next call was at Utica, where more old friends provided hospitality. This visit coincided with the annual "Noson Lawen" and "Cymanfa Ganu," which he much enjoyed. One of the lady artistes was a relative of "Hen Dyddyn," well known to men at Oakeley many years ago.

Mr. Thomas was impressed by the number attending religious services in the United States but comments rather sadly in referring to the Welsh chapel at Detroit



that Welsh is gradually dying in the Welsh congregation there.

On his motoring journeys, amounting to something like 2,500 miles, Mr. Thomas gained first-hand experience of the "motel" accommodation for car and passengers, of which we are beginning to hear over here. Apparently he approves. He also speaks of the wide, straight roads and fascinating scenery.

### **At Radio City**

By rail from Detroit to Port Washington, near New York, there to see more relatives, was the first stage of the homeward journey, and from there Mr. Thomas was able to visit such well-known sights as the Empire State Building, Broadway, Coney Island and the spectacular entertainment at Radio City, as well as marvel at the view of the skyscrapers by night.

A quiet passage by the "Queen Elizabeth" to Cherbourg and Southampton concluded the "experience of a lifetime," which Mr. Thomas says he will remember perhaps most of all for the kindness and hospitality of everyone he met.

### **Quarry Associations**

While in the United States Mr. Thomas was photographed with a group of people who have associations with our quarries and are well known in Ffestiniog.

In the picture are Mr. W. N. Smart of Bronx, New York, a son of the late Thomas Smart who was at one time engineer at Oakeley, and a brother of Bertie Smart, now at Penrhyn Quarry; Mrs.



*From the left (back row) are : Mrs. Smart, Mr. Thomas, Miss Picton Parry, Mrs. Williams (Mr. Thomas' sister from South Wales), Mr. Smart. Front : Mr. Nem Roberts, Mrs. Picton Parry and Mrs. M. Richards.*

Smart, a sister of Mrs. Thomas, wife of Mr. W. H. Thomas, rockman and securer at Oakeley, who now lives near Detroit; Mrs. Picton Parry of Brooklyn, daughter of the late Mr. J. Jones, who at one time owned the Commercial Hotel, and Miss Parry (the late Mr. Picton Parry was a brother of Idris Williams' mother); Mr. Nem Roberts of New York, who for many years served with the old Ffestiniog Railway, and Mrs. M. Richards, of Port Washington, Long Island, a native of Llan Ffestiniog, whose family lived at the old farm called "Llety Gwilym."



*Worked underground  
for 57 years*

## **Presentations to Votty “Old Timer”**

**Q**UARRYMEN from above and below ground assembled at the Votty mill to bid farewell and good wishes to an “old timer,” Owen Samuel Owen, on his retirement, and to present him with a walking stick, a pipe and a ready-filled tobacco pouch.

Standing on a saw bench, Owen Samuel Owen’s upright figure,

belied his age—he is 71—and his remarkable working record of 57 years in the Votty mine—a record which can rarely have been surpassed.

During the whole of that time he seldom missed a day’s work underground for, as he told *Caban*, he enjoyed very good health throughout, although for the last thirty

years he journeyed daily to the quarry from his home in Portmadoc. For many of those years he travelled on the Ffestiniog Railway, leaving at 4.45 a.m., and returning at about 7 o’clock at night. “I almost dislike seeing the old line re-opening again, because it reminds me too much of those tiring days,” he remarked.

Signed on at Votty just before his fourteenth birthday by his father, who was a pump attendant at the quarry for close on fifty years, Owen Samuel Owen worked in turn as labourer, rockman, platelayer and, finally, “hooker-on” on the main incline. In the intervals between trains he found time to fashion ash trays and ornamental shoes out of odd pieces of slate.

He likes to recall what might well be the only instance of a horse replacing steam! This happened when the steam locomotive dubbed “Taffy” was introduced for haulage in the adit level at Votty, but it created so much smoke and fumes that it had to be withdrawn from that particular section and the horse put back into service until the advent of diesel and electric locomotives.

Perhaps Owen Samuel Owen’s most vivid recollection is of the religious revival which swept through Wales about half a century ago and exerted its influence in the remotest workings of the quarries. In the underground cabanau during this period the mid-day “breaks” would be marked by spontaneous outbursts of praying and hymn-singing, and Owen Samuel Owen confessed that he himself was greatly affected.

### **Many changes**

In the course of his long working life—Mr. Emlyn Jones is the sixth manager he has worked under—he has seen many changes. “There has been a great improvement in working conditions at the quarry,” he said, “and so far as actual work is concerned the present-day generation don’t know they’re born.”

Owen G. Hughes, who presided at the presentation, referred to Owen Samuel Owen as “one of



*Presentation ceremony in the mill*



the Votty stalwarts," and those who handed over the gifts, John Evans, Handel Roberts and Richard David Jones, added their tributes and good wishes on behalf of the underground and surface workers. Mr. John Henry Williams spoke for the officials,



Departing with his presents. He also received an envelope containing "a handsome sum of money!"

and Mr. Emlyn Jones on behalf of the company thanked Owen Samuel Owen warmly for his exceptional service. Subscribers were thanked by David Rees Roberts and R. D. Williams.

It was a happy function, and two points which emerged were an expressed desire that future retirements should be similarly marked and that there should be no differentiation between "hogiau'r twll" and "dynion yr injan"—miners and slatemakers respectively. All were "hogiau'r chwarel"—quarrymen—was the reminder.

## Studies in expression

### Snapshots at Bonc Goedan

THE expressive pictures on the page opposite are those of members of the Bonc Goedan Caban at Oakeley. Our photographer took these individual snapshots of the quarrymen as they sat at the tables, by way of a change from the group photographs of cabannau which have appeared from time to time in these pages.

The men pictured are, left to right from the top :

#### First row :

Robert Ivor Davies, Hubert Lewis, Fred Ramskill, Ellis Roberts.

#### Second row :

John G. Hughes, John O. Williams, John Joseph Williams, Owen Morris.

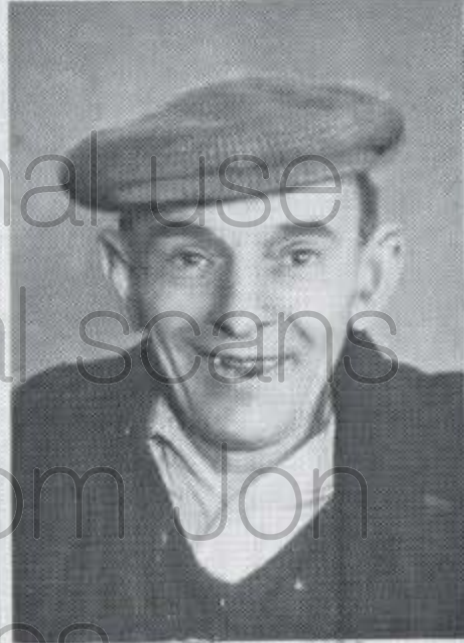
#### Third row :

Dewi Wynn Owen, Evan R. Jones, Robert Goodman, David G. Owen.

#### Fourth row :

Richard Gwilym Jones, David Lloyd Jones, Emlyn Williams, Percy Roberts.





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# *“Text-book example of pillar and stall workings”*

*These impressions of a visit to the Oakeley quarry are contributed to “Caban” by J. M. Watson, B.Sc., A.R.I.C.S., M.I.Min.E., lecturer in mining and mine surveying at the University of Nottingham. Mr. Watson has more than once toured our quarries with students from the University.*

THE road to the Oakeley Quarries has been made on the spoil heaps from old workings and as one looks down on the horse-shoe cavity left by past quarrying operations one is impressed with the immensity of the workings.

Now, however, they are no longer quarries as such. Present workings are reached by highly inclined dipping drifts which penetrate to R level 1,000 feet underground. They are developed as an integral part of a modern system of deep mining for the production of a high-class quality of slate, one of the country's principal sources of natural roofing material and a product which has been and still is sent to all parts of the country.

## ***Inclined drifts***

To the mining student interested in the method of working Oakeley stands out as a classic and text-book example of pillar and stall workings in highly inclined strata dipping upwards of 45 degrees, the method of mining involving 50 per cent. extraction and 50 per cent. roof support.

The workings are approached by the various inclined drifts and are also accessible by series of steps made on the full dip of the strata to the lowest working level. These levels or laterals have been driven off the main drifts and as the workings have deepened secondary drifts have been driven with their corresponding laterals.

The distance between levels is approximately sixty feet, and they are interconnected by ventilation drifts, driven as headings, to provide ascensional ventilation.

## ***Lesson in efficiency***

The method of working in the chambers or rooms is to drive a pilot heading up one side of the chamber and then to blast the slate broadside on, along the cleavage planes, in order to get it in as large a mass as practicable. This slate is then lowered to the floor of the chamber and hoisted on to flat-bottomed bogies for transportation along the levels to the main drift.

To look up the full height of one of these chambers—sixty feet—and note the agility with which



the face men reach their working place and carry on their work is a lesson in efficiency and care.

### ***Chequered draught-board***

Survey plans depicting the working of several veins superimposed one on the other are certainly rather difficult to understand at first glance, but once they have been explained to the visitor they are easily understood. They form a chequered draught-board of the method of working, efficient and economical in every detail.

It is interesting to note that the face workers and the surface dressers work as teams and are paid on piece-work. Consequently it behoves the men underground to keep the surface workers supplied with plenty of raw slate. The larger the slate blocks sent up out of the mine the bigger the slates that can be made—more “princesses” than “duchesses” or “countesses” for instance (the various sizes of slate have their various names).

### ***Fascinating***

Incidentally, different qualities of slate are produced from the same vein. These the trained eye can detect when the slate is being prepared for the market, and they affect the thickness into which the slate can be cleaved.

Preparation of the slate is very interesting. One notes the ease with which the slate is broken down into lumps of about 2 cwt. for handling, then sawn by mechanical means into small pieces

ready for splitting. To the uninitiated the splitting seems an easy task. It is fascinating to stand and watch how easily this appears to be done.

### ***Try it!***

One is kept spellbound for some considerable time. It seems easy enough to look along the cleavage planes, place the chisel along these, give it a gentle tap with a mallet, then insert a second chisel a few inches further along and, as the chisel sinks into the slate, give each a quick twist in opposite directions and see the slate slab split up. But try it! Your slate is twice the thickness it should be, or the slate has not cleaved properly.

As a member of a student body which has visited the Oakeley Slate Quarries and its associate, the Votty Slate Quarries, I am indebted to the management for the privilege of visiting the quarries on more than one occasion.

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### ***Rainfall record***

**R**ETURNING to work after the annual holiday, our quarrymen were plunged into one of the wettest spells ever experienced. In the eight days from August 11-18, 1956, the Oakeley gauge—located at the Middle Quarry on the 1,100 feet level—registered 10.77 inches of rain, equal to six months' rainfall in the drier parts of Britain.

In Essex, for example, the total rainfall in 1954 was under 20 inches. During the first eighteen days of August the Oakeley rainfall was 14.62 inches, compared with 10.90 inches for the same period in 1954 (an unusually wet year) and only 1.71 inches in August, 1955—a summer of pleasant memories!





Going down!

FOR most of the members of the North Wales District Committee of the Welsh Board for Industry, although they are familiar with the general pattern of industry in Wales, a visit to the underground workings of the Oakeley Quarry towards the end of July was a novel experience.

Following one of their meetings, held at Blaenau Ffestiniog, members of the committee—on which industry and Government Departments are represented—with their chairman, Mr. Derek Graesser, of Sandycroft, Cheshire, were welcomed at Oakeley by Mr. Harry Cutts, our Managing Director, and afterwards conducted on a tour of the mine and the mills, which lasted about two hours.

Under the guidance of Mr. Cutts, Mr. Gwilym Humphreys, the Oakeley manager, Mr. I. W.

## Welsh Board for Industry

### North Wales Committee Members at Oakeley

Williams, the quarry engineer, and Mr. W. Thomas, an under-manager, the visitors entered three underground chambers on P floor and showed the liveliest interest in the various operations entailed in winning slate from the bowels of the mountain.

Rockmen demonstrated their function by clambering up the precipitous rock in P.9 and afterwards neatly splitting a huge block of slate weighing about six tons, which had just been brought down from the working face of the chamber.

A striking illustration of the effectiveness of the dust suppression equipment employed throughout the quarry was afforded when, in the course of a drilling operation, the dust bag was momentarily removed to reveal a cloud of dust emanating from the deepening hole in the block.

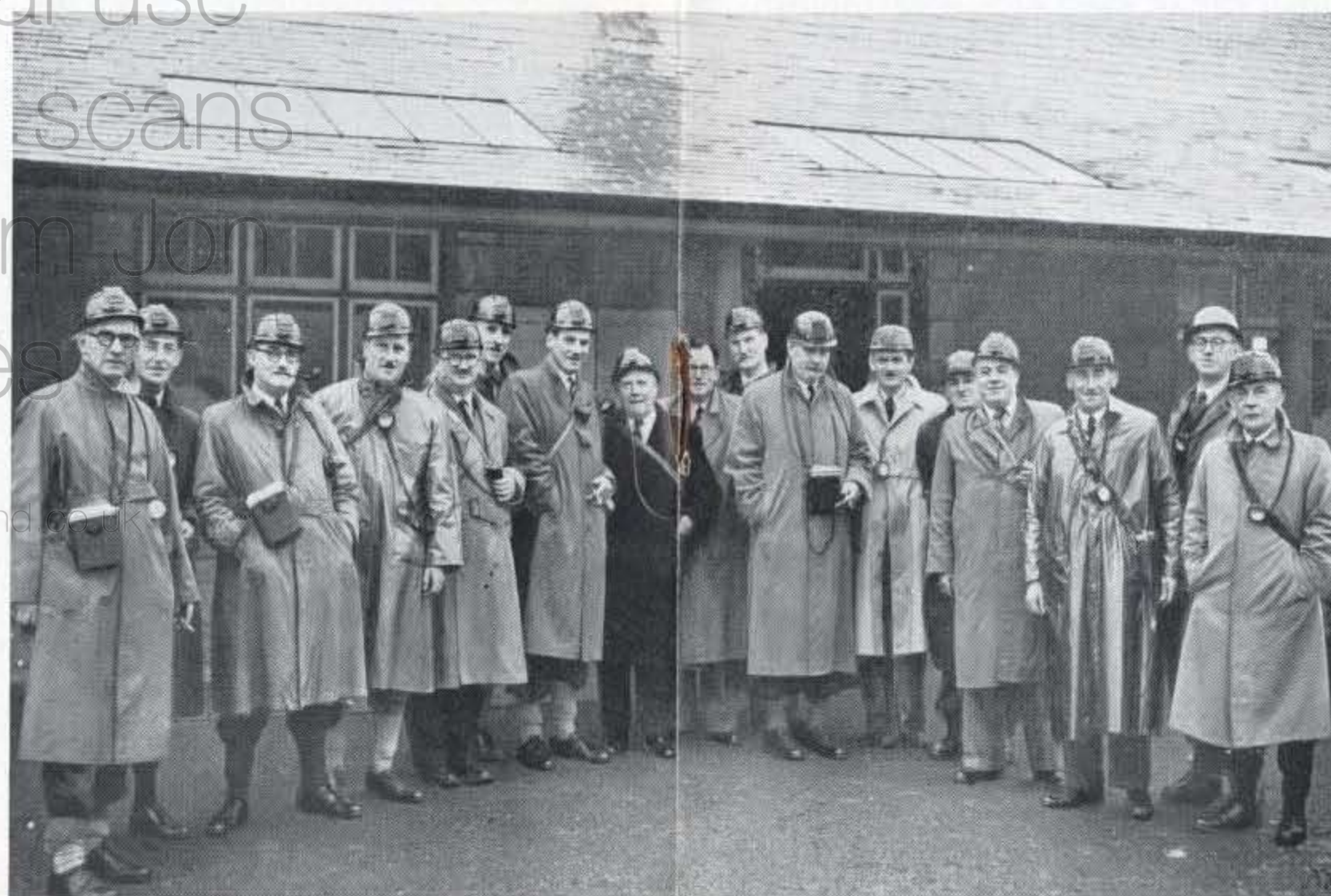
In P.10 the party approached, somewhat gingerly, a roped-off opening in the floor of the chamber running at a steep angle to the floor below, and their attention was captured by a securer who swung down into the gaping hole

on a heavy rope to test the “roof” for any sign of looseness. This was an example of the safety measures which are constantly observed in the mine.

Returning to the surface, the visitors entered Bonc Goedan mill to see the remaining stages of slate production—block-sawing, splitting and slate dressing—and



In P.8



In this group, pictured outside the quarry offices, are (from left) Mr. Herbert Davies (Central Office of Information); Mr. Owen Bruntnell, assistant secretary of the Welsh Board for Industry; Mr. Arthur T. Burton, secretary of the Board; Mr. F. R. Ashmole (Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation); Mr. Geraint Walters (Director for Wales of the Ministry of Works); Lt.-Col. M. I. Williams-Ellis; Mr. Derek Graesser (chairman of the North Wales Committee of the Board); Mr. Harry Cutts; Mr. T. Lewis (Ministry of Labour); Mr. J. G. Davies (Ministry of Works); Mr. W. T. Collins (Ministry of Fuel and Power); Major R. Homfray; Mr. I. W. Williams; Mr. Richard Roberts (North Wales organiser of the General and Municipal Workers' Union); Mr. A. Griffiths (Iron and Steel Confederation); Mr. Gwilym Humphreys and Mr. W. Theon Morgan (Admiralty).





*Absorbed in the activities of the rockmen*

inspect samples of the finished product.

The men who demonstrated the various operations in the mine were Messrs. Morris Hughes, Thomas Davies, Eifion Roberts, William Jones and James Parry, and in the mill Messrs. John G. Hughes and Robert G. Goodman.

From the general reaction of the visitors to what was for many of them a new experience it was apparent that they had greatly enjoyed the tour and found it an enlightening experience.

Three points on which Mr. Derek Graesser particularly commented were the vastness of the

underground chambers, the skill and apparent ease with which the men split the blocks of slate exactly as they desired, and the partnership system of working a "bargain" and making the slates.

Mr. Graesser said to *Caban* that before his visit to Oakeley he had no conception of what it was like in a slate mine. "I have had a lot of ideas about slate quarrying knocked out of my head," he remarked. "I was very impressed with the conditions underground, the lack of dust and the clean atmosphere generally. Working conditions in this quarry are far better than those in many other industries I have seen."



## ARITHMETICAL LINK WITH HERRINGS

SLATES and herrings may seem an odd combination, but there is a link between them—an arithmetical one which seems to be peculiar to the quarrying and fishing industries.

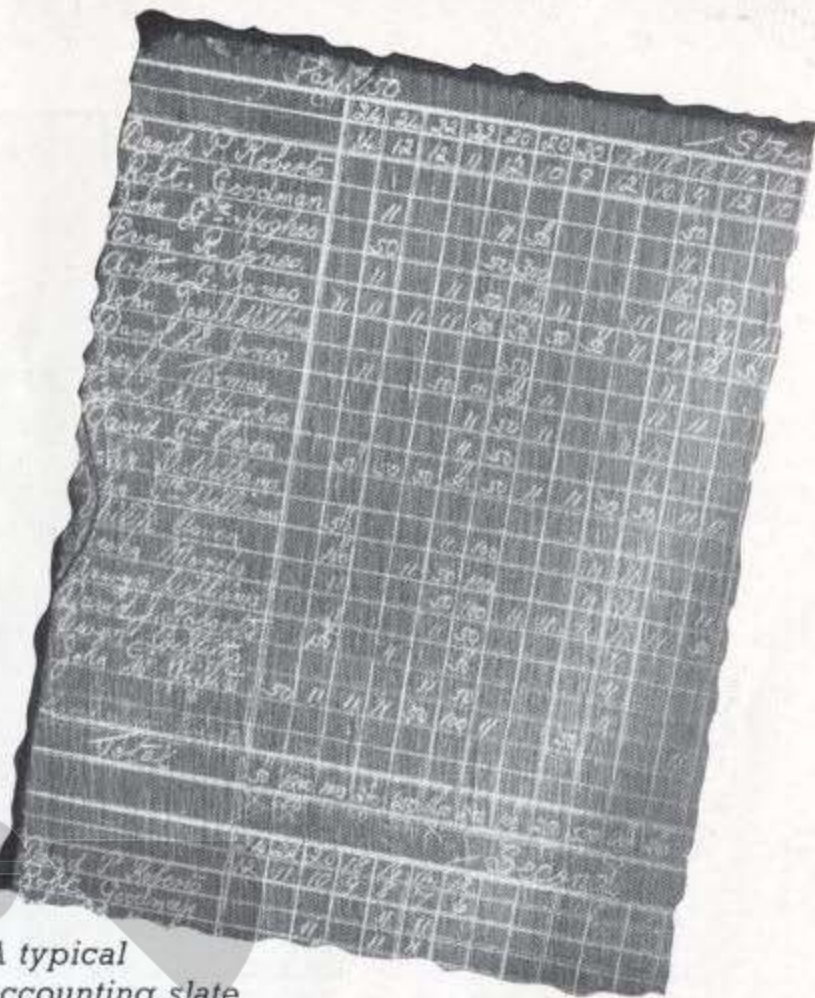
*Mwrw* is the key word. It signifies three—the multiple in which slates are counted at our quarries and also, we are informed, herrings at Welsh and Cornish fishing ports. At least, it used to be employed by the herring fishermen of Nefyn.

Outside these industries the word *mmrw* is seldom, if ever, heard and such Welsh dictionaries as we have consulted do not give it. Whatever its origin and the reason for its adoption in the slate quarries of Wales, *mmrw* is a fundamental term in the traditional system of accounting for slates.

Ask a slate inspector at Oakeley and he will tell you: "It is far easier and quicker to count slates in threes."

Certainly the system is thoroughly efficient judging by the rapidity with which the slate inspectors tot up the day's yield of slates from the mills.

Output is in the first place recorded on "accounting slates," which all slate inspectors carry, and the visitor is invariably impressed by the neatness and legibility of the columned words and figures cut into the stone with steel scribers.



A typical  
accounting slate

An ordinary notebook would be useless for making a slate count on a rainy day. A square of slate is ideal. Whatever is written on it will not wash off and the record is as permanent as the rocks of the mountains around.

Every slate inspector carries a set of accounting slates used for recording the surplus from the previous month as well as the current "make" during the 4-weekly period. Figures are entered against the names of the quarrymen under the size and type of slate produced, and on the back of one of the slates is recorded the precise number and type of slates loaded for transport to the wharf.

But that is not the end of the slate inspector's duties. He has to transfer the figures from the record on stone into the conventional account book which gives the story of slate production through the years.



## Our roving camera records...

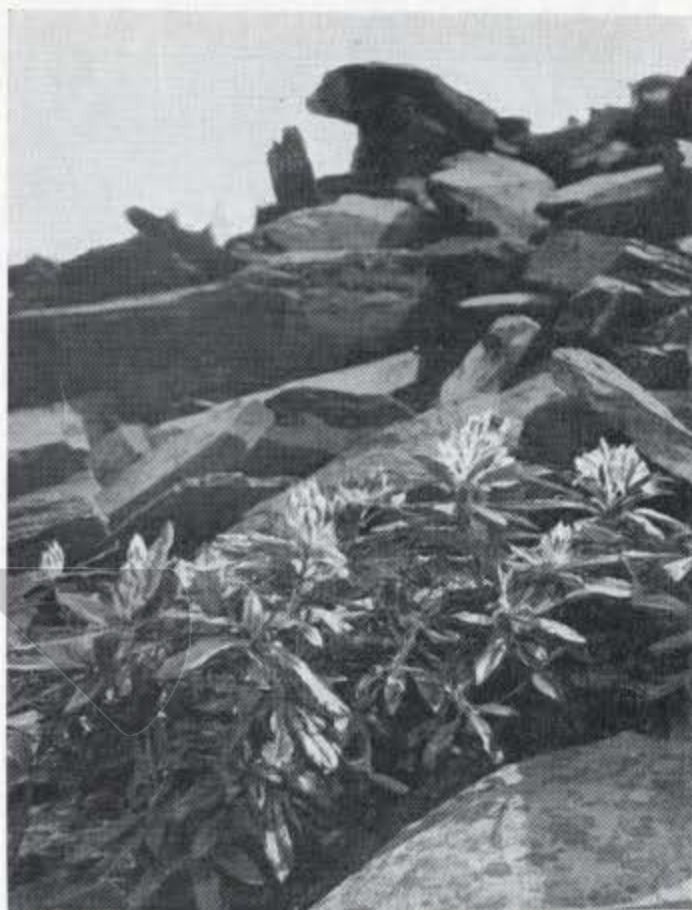
### *Art down the mine!*

**A**LWAYS on the look-out for the unusual, our photographer spotted this sketch of a blackbird on a bough, drawn in pink crayon on the rock face at K pass-by on the main incline of the Votty mine. Pictured touching up the sketch by the light of his electric lamp is Richard Hugh Williams, hooker-on on the incline, who indulged in this



artistic exercise while waiting to send truckloads of slate to the surface. Williams, who has been working at Votty for 37 years, modestly explained his interest in art by saying that he likes to do a little sketching "just for the fun of it."

### *Rhododendrons amid the rubble*



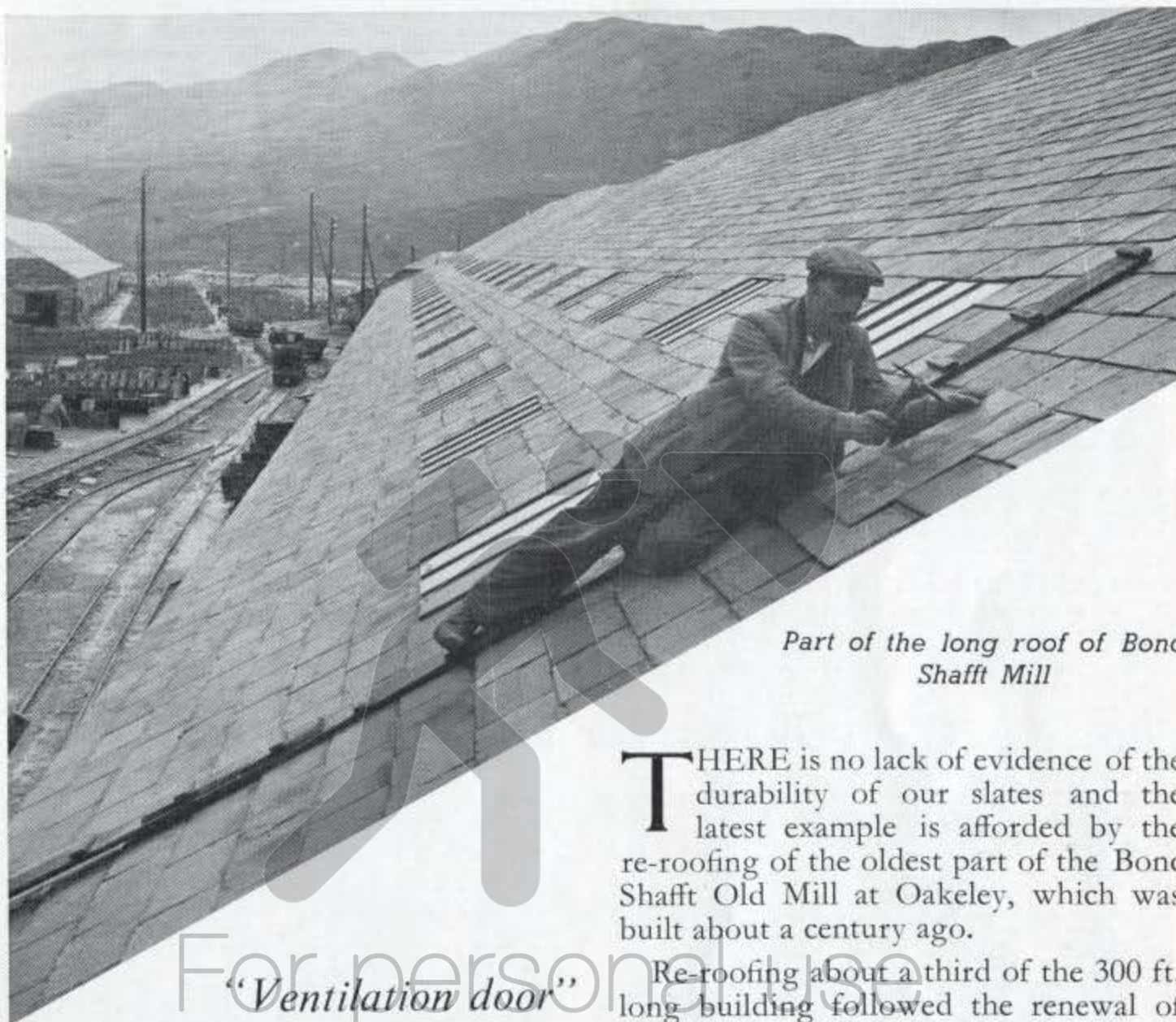
**T**HE picture above was taken when the rhododendrons were in bloom and shows a shrub flowering "in splendid isolation" in the midst of a heap of slate rubble at Votty—an instance of seed falling and germinating on very rocky ground in a countryside where the rhododendron contributes gay splashes of colour in early summer.

### *I Floor experiment*

**F**ITTING snugly into the tunnel on Votty's I floor is this ventilation door, a recent installation designed to control the circulation of air in the workings in this area. When closed the door diverts the air stream by way of a lower level to return to I floor in an upward flow. The door, which is an experiment, is also effective in reducing the cool draught created by the strong current of fresh air moving through the tunnel. Standing by the door is J. Henry Williams, under-manager, who joined the Votty staff as a rockman in 1942 and has been an under-manager for the past eight years.



# 100 YEARS OLD – AND GOOD FOR ANOTHER CENTURY



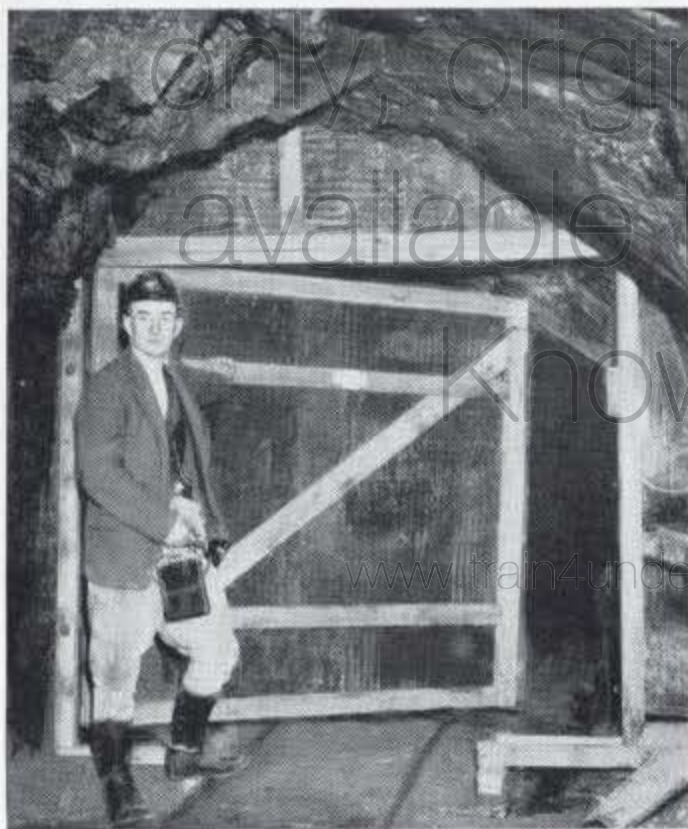
*Part of the long roof of Bonc Shafft Mill*

**T**HERE is no lack of evidence of the durability of our slates and the latest example is afforded by the re-roofing of the oldest part of the Bonc Shafft Old Mill at Oakeley, which was built about a century ago.

Re-roofing about a third of the 300 ft. long building followed the renewal of the decaying timbers and many of the slates removed were in such excellent condition that, after re-dressing, they were perfectly suitable for use again in the new roof.

Other slates required came from the equally old roof of the Penybont Mill, which was demolished last year. By utilising the old but still serviceable slates the re-roofing of a 100 ft. section of the Old Mill was completed without drawing a single newly-made slate from stock, and the roof now looks good for at least another century!

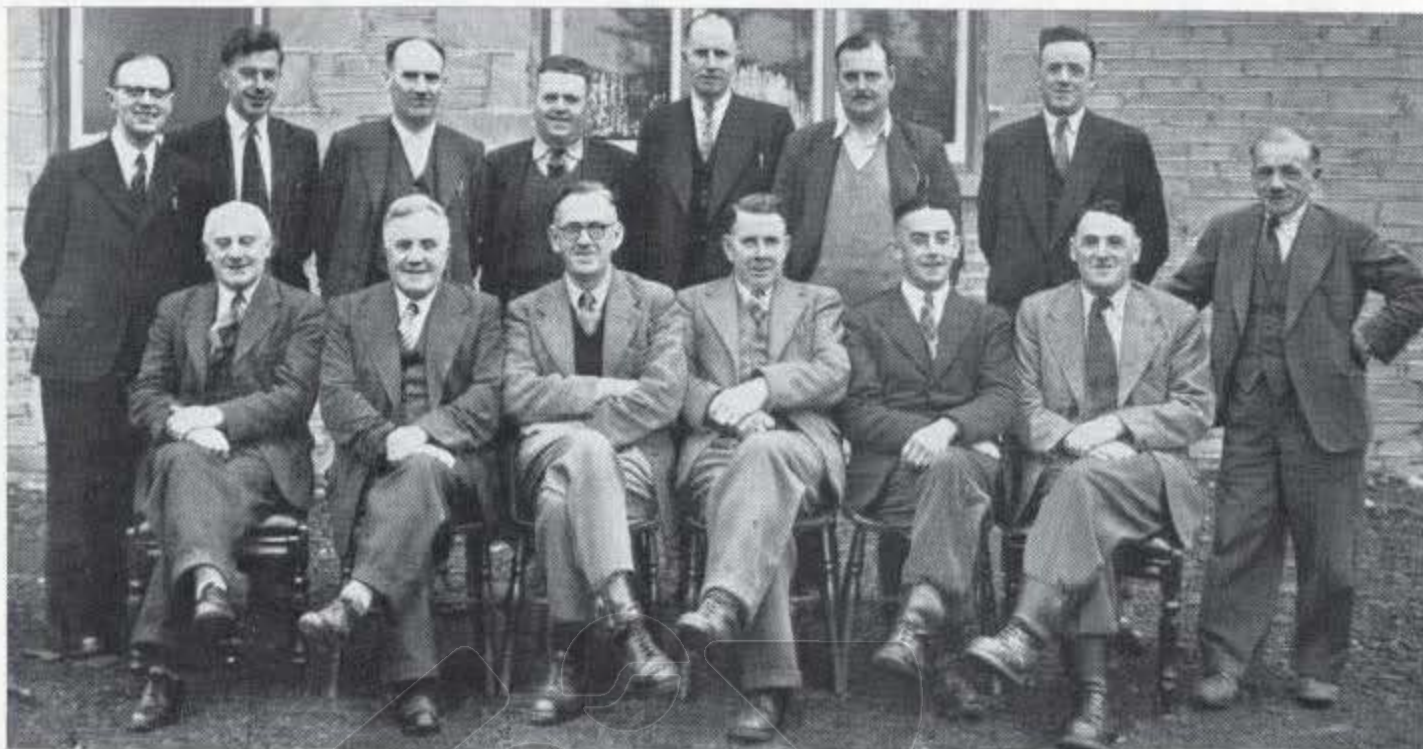
In our picture slater Hugh Owen Jones puts the finishing touches to the new roof. The timber work was the responsibility of Evan G. Jones, Oak-eley carpenter, and his assistants, Austin Lewis and Emrys Davies.



*"Ventilation door"*

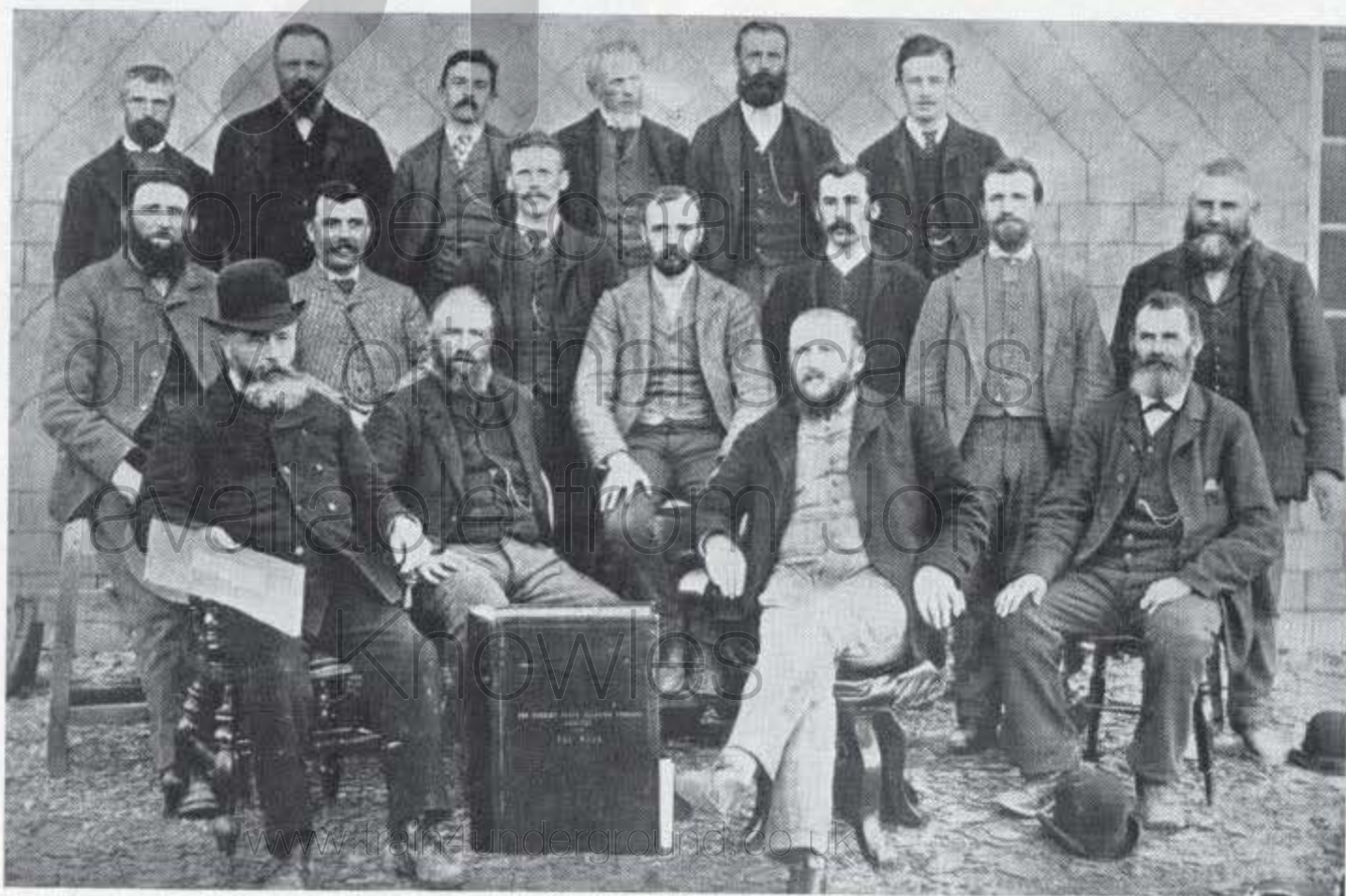


## Oakeley Staff in 1956 . . .



Standing (from left) : *David J. Jones, John D. Barlow, Idris Jones, R. Francis Hughes, Morris J. Jones, Evan Ll. Morris, Wm. O. Williams, John O. Williams.*  
 Sitting : *E. Jarret Jones, H. Gwilym Jones, Gwilym Humphreys, William Thomas, Alfred Humphreys, Idris W. Williams.*

## . . . And in the 1890's



Back row : *Edward Owen, Richard Roberts, Robert H. Jones, Evan Jones, John Pierce, H. Bryfdir Jones.*  
 Middle row : *John Parry, Lewis Thomas, John R. Davies, William Owen, William Rowlands, William Evans, Ellis Owen.*  
 Front row , *Robert Roberts, Richard Lloyd, Owen Jones, Hugh Hughes.*



# Slate for River Defence Works



*Reinforcement at one of the bends of the River Artro*

**I**N the course of the past few months hundreds of tons of huge slate blocks, long since discarded as unsuitable for the mills, have been removed from the Oakeley dumps. This picture illustrates what happens to them.

The blocks are being utilised to provide a firm foundation for defence works on the River Artro at Llanbedr, near Harlech, a scheme undertaken by the Gwynedd River Board to arrest erosion of the banks and protect the surrounding land from the extensive flooding which occurs in times of heavy rain.

Earlier attempts to control the flood waters of the river, which for years has been threatening to change its course, have not proved successful. In search of a remedy Mr. Alwyn Jones, the board's engineer, considered three schemes, the first utilising concrete, the second an

Italian method employing wire mesh cages filled with stones (known as *gabions*), and the third, slate blocks. After weighing up the advantages and cost he plumped for the slate as the most effective and economical answer to a troublesome problem.

Tipped into the deep holes, the blocks are so heavy that floods will never move them, and built into the banks they can be virtually impregnable. "The slate defences should last hundreds of years," says Mr. Alwyn Jones.

In all, about 3,000 tons of blocks will be incorporated in the defences along a half-mile length of the winding river. When completed, the scheme is expected to safeguard from flooding hundreds of acres of agricultural land which is particularly valuable in this area where such land is scarce.



# Quarrymen and at

## Contrast in jobs

FROM the heights to the depths—that sums up the experience of a newcomer at Votty, Harold Leslie Hughes. He was a scaffolder and erector at Reading and one of his last jobs found him working 500 ft. above the River Thames building a pylon to carry power cables high enough over the river to clear all shipping.

Now he drives a diesel locomotive on the tunnel railway on Votty's I floor—and his first day on this job was his first down a mine! "It has certainly been a big change for me," he confessed, "but I have settled down very well, because everyone has been so kind and friendly, and I find the job very interesting."

Harold Leslie Hughes is an Englishman, and he abandoned scaffolding when he married a Welsh girl, Miss Eirlys Hughes, of Tanygrisiau, daughter of a former Oakeley quarryman, and made his home in the village. He is 27 and was one of the first to be called up under National Service introduced after the war. He served with the R.A.F. as a rigger.

*John Ellis*



*Miners David Rees Roberts and John Jones prepare for shot-firing. (See page 24)*

## Storeman

PICTURED in his office on the Votty level is John Ellis, who has, perhaps, one of the least spectacular jobs in the quarry, but nevertheless a very responsible one. He is the store-keeper, the man to whom everybody goes when they need spares and replacements or the tools for the mine and the mill.

In John Ellis' books are listed many hundreds of items, from candles to gun-powder, nails to diamond saws, and he has to see that the quarry never runs short of any of these things.

In the storerooms you will find some curious relics of the old days, among them the acetylene lamps which miners once used to light their way. One of John Ellis' duties now is to keep the electric lamps well charged and in good order. He also weighs the loaded wag-gons as they come from the mine.

John Ellis was formerly a joiner at Votty, where he has worked for a quarter of a century.



# at work — leisure

## *Man of many parts*

**P**UTTING miniature ships into bottles seems to be one of the more mysterious accomplishments of those with a bent for modelling, and one who has mastered the art is Phillip Owens, slate maker at Oakeley's Bonc Coedan.

A man of many interests, Phillip Owens, who has been working at Oakeley for thirty years, is rarely at a loss for something to do in off-duty hours. He can turn to modelling, woodwork, drawing, painting in oils and music, and is pretty skilful in all these fields.

He used to play the violin in the Oakeley Orchestra, which was disbanded many years ago, and now his love of music finds expression chiefly in the ballroom—he plays the violin and the alto-saxophone in a local five-piece dance band (conducted by Robert G. Jones, a former rockman at Oakeley), and travels with them to fulfil engagements in various towns.

*Harold Leslie Hughes*



*Delicate work by a slate maker's hands*

In our art exhibition last year examples of Philip Owens' work were to be seen. He paints portraits in oils and local scenes, makes model aeroplanes, carves in wood and slate—a barometer is an example in this familiar medium—and fashions useful articles in wood, for he was a joiner before he turned to making slates.

And the ships in bottles? Phillip Owens says it is "fairly easy" to insert a model ship with its masts and rigging into a large bottle, but a small container presents a more difficult problem. Not long ago he was challenged to put a windjammer into a small-size aspirin bottle, and our picture is proof of the challenge met. "It was a tricky job," said Phillip Owens.

Many examples of his art and handicraft are to be found in his home, but relatives and friends also benefit from his many hobbies—they often receive his models and other works with his compliments.



# Votty miner carries on family tradition

EVERY working day the miners who work in the depths of the Oakeley and Votty quarries burrow a little further through the vitals of the mountains, for the pursuit of the best slate never ends.

Miners, working in pairs, are in the forefront of all development. Their's is the task of boring and blasting a way through the rock and gaining a "first footing" in a new chamber for the rockmen to begin their assault on the slate vein.

## *"Blazed the trail"*

Quarrying being so much a family occupation, earlier generations of miners have in many cases "blazed the trail" for their sons to follow. Down on I floor we found John (Harker) Jones and his partner driving a tunnel from I 34 preparatory to the opening-up of a new chamber.

John Jones—the "Harker"—is a family name used to identify him from the other Joneses—came to Votty straight from school about 30 years ago to become a miner like his father, and grandfather before him.

He cannot remember exactly how many years his father and grandfather worked in the quarry, but he told us: "I think my family can claim to have driven miles of tunnels at Votty."

In driving a tunnel John Harker Jones, like other miners, is guided

as much by his own experience as by the expert surveys which are essential preliminaries to any development. But the route is determined in a large measure by the inclination of the rock. The miner burrows "under the hard"—cutting through and across the vein of slate over which the tough rock slopes steeply downwards.

It would take John Harker Jones and his partner two to three months to extend the level from I 34 to the prospective I 35. They tunnel a distance of approximately 80 feet, so as to leave a pillar of rock some thirty to forty feet wide between the old chamber and the new, as a massive natural support of the floor above.

## *Breed budgerigars*

Apart from their mining partnership, John Jones and his colleague, David Rees Roberts, who is chairman of I caban, have something else in common. They both breed budgerigars, prize birds at that, and find it an absorbing hobby.

Both have won prizes at local shows, but at different times. They have not yet ventured to challenge one another on the show bench! If you ask John Harker Jones whether his birds talk, he will tell you that they do—"in Welsh, of course."



# News Exchange

## After Service in Germany

**O**AKELEY quarrymen have welcomed back Robert Ivor Davies after his two-year spell of National Service and his fellow workmen at Bonc Goedan marked his return by making him chairman of their caban. Robert Ivor Davies, who is 22, served with the R.A.M.C. and spent most of the



time in Germany, stationed at Essen. He played football for the unit team in various matches. A former apprentice at Oakeley, he told *Caban*: "It is nice to be back working with old friends."

## Vocalist

John Merfyn Jones, labourer on I floor at Votty, won third prize in the challenge solo competition at the Llan Ffestiniog Eisteddfod.

## GAIR ODDIWRTH

### LLWYD O GORWEN

**F**E gofia darllenwyr *Caban* i ni gyhoeddi yn ein rhifyn diwethaf ychydig o benillion oddiwrth un o'n pensiynwyr—Edward Lloyd o Gorwen—ac fel y symbylwyd atebiad awenyddol o swyddfa'r chwarel ganddo.

Dyma ddywed Edward Lloyd y tro hwn.

Synais weld y "gair o Gorwen"  
A'i rigymau'n llenwi'r ddalen ;  
Diolch i'r golygydd tirion  
Am roi gofod i'r penillion.

Darlun da gaed o'r hen "Fet'ran"  
Owen Griffith, doniol, diddan ;  
Cyfaill ffyddlon a dirodres  
Heb un pigyn yn ei fynwes.

'Does fawr hwyl ar Lwydyn heno  
Am rai dyddiau bum yn cwyno ;  
'Rwyf yn mendio, cefais foddion  
A rhyw bils i wella'r galon.

Daliwch i fendio 'rhen Lwyd—a  
daliwch i ganu.

## Oakeley Club

Officers of the Oakeley Club for 1956-57, elected at the annual meeting, are: President, Sir Charles Oakeley, Bart.; vice-presidents, Mr. Harry Cutts and Mr. Humphrey Lewis; secretary, Mr. George Woolford, and treasurer, Mr. Dennis Roberts.

## For the record!

Cut into the slate-flagged footway leading to the rear entrance of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch is the outline of a fish—a salmon which weighed 38 lb., and is believed to be the biggest fish that has come out of the River Dwyryd.



## OAKELEY CHOIR – a social occasion

ON the occasion of the annual dinner of the Oakeley Choir, held at the Queen's Hotel in June, and attended by all the members and their ladies, the guests included Mr. L. F. Davies, former headmaster of Glanypwll and one of the three surviving members of the renowned Moelwyn Male Voice Choir; Mr. Lewis Moelwyn Jones, poet, eisteddfod conductor and the choir's elocutionist and compere; Mr. G. W. Humphreys, manager of Oakeley Quarry, and Mr. Emlyn Jones, the Votty manager.

### *Zeal and enthusiasm*

A letter expressing regret for his inability to attend the function was

read from Mr. Harry Cutts, our Managing Director.

After-dinner speeches were made by the guests, who expressed appreciation of the wonderful zeal, enthusiasm and loyalty of the members of the choir and their conductor.

In the entertainment that followed, Mrs. George Ellis, the choir's accompanist, and Mr. Richard Jones, one of the members, contributed two humorous sketches which "brought the house down."

To conclude the evening the choir under their conductor, Mr. T. O. Thomas, rendered selections from their extensive repertoire.

*Assembly in the dining room*





## *Penybont, Oakeley, in 1923*

**T**HIS 1923 photograph of quarrymen at Penybont, Oakeley, was lent to *Caban* by William Jones, slate maker at Votty, who says that many of the men pictured took leading parts in cultural movements in the district.



Front row (from left) : Robert R. Jones, E. L. Evans, Bob Owen, Harry Jones, John Bethsaida Williams, D. Lloyd, Evan Owen, E. and J. Jones.

Second row : R. Roberts (W. Edwards), R. Williams, R. Evans, L. A. Jones, D. Williams, D. Roberts, H. Williams, T. J. Jones.

Third row : R. Roberts, R. Parry, J. Pritchard, Tom Evans, J. E. Jones, D. Jones, J. Roberts, Ed. Jones, J. Hughes, E. Davies, D. Evans, J. Hughes, J. Williams.

Fourth row : J. W. Jones, L. Wood, H. Ll. Williams, G. Griffiths, Wm. Williams, D. Rowlands, D. Roberts, W. Jones, Dick Penrhyn.

Fifth row : O. Williams, W. Jones, E. Jones, G. Williams.

### **OUR BACK COVER PICTURE**

### **SPION KOP INCLINE**

Viewpoint of our back cover picture is from the head of Oakeley's Spion Kop incline, part of the main line of the quarry's railway system along which outgoing truck-loads of finished slates travel from the mills to the despatch wharf at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

From Bonc Shafft Mill—the farthest from the incline—to the wharf the slate trains have a run of about two miles, passing the site of the old Penybont mill and then descending the shorter Dinas incline. Locomotives take over for the various stages on the flat.

Handling the trucks is known as "crewing"—the origin of the term is obscure—and a full train consists of sixteen trucks which are sent down the incline in pairs. The empty waggons are simultaneously drawn up the incline in twos.

Harry Parry is the senior loader at Spion Kop, so named because the incline was constructed during the South African War.

In our picture is to be seen, in the middle background, the slate wharf and the Blaenau Ffestiniog North station and, in the far distance, Trawsfynydd Lake, the source of water power of the Maentwrog hydro-electric station.

Almost immediately below the incline is the railway between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Betws-y-Coed, and adjacent to the railway on its right the terminal section, now overgrown, of the "Lein Bach"—the old narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway.





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### *Spion Kop, Oakeley*

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.

Printed by R. E. Jones & Bros. Ltd., The Quay Conway