CABAN and Other Matters

The Cabanau of the Oakeley and of the other quarries of the Ffestiniog district had always played an important part in the lives of the men of the quarries, whether they were a slab-walled hut on the tip or a blocked off level far below ground. They developed into a traditional institution, with strict rules and formal atmosphere, promoting discussion and self-education amongst the men while counselling and religion also raised their heads. Formal minutes were taken and recorded in the language of the quarry - Welsh - those fortunate enough to have one of these old record books are fortunate indeed.

It was in 1949 or probably slightly earlier that the Oakeley Quarry head management seems to have decided to take the institution into print. True, not for the first time, for they had produced special souvenir booklets on previous occasions, but this was to be “Caban”, a magazine by and about the Oakeley and Votty quarries.

From the start the writers, at least of the main rather than the supporting articles, never seemed entirely sure whom they were addressing: the men; their families or those hardly likely to see the quarries, in other words, their customers: the slate merchants and building firms. The magazine was thus a slightly uneasy mix of its various parts. Long running sections were the “News Exchange” containing news of the various members of the quarries’ workforce past and present, the doings of the Oakeley Quarry Club - strangely enough given part of the Old Hospital at Rhiwbryfdir in the same year as the first issue of Caban (see Chapter 29 for the details of this), “Youth carries On” and similar titles told of new apprentices joining the workforce, “Roof of the World” gave news of building using Oakeley & Votty slates and “Between Ourselves” contained potted biographies of quarry personalities, their hobbies and pastimes. A number of articles concentrated on the work of the various sections of the quarry community: Miners; Rockmen; Surveyors; Securers; Under Managers etc. A further series took the reader on a conducted tour of the workings at Oakeley and Votty, although the former predominated. In later issues visits of outside personalities to the quarries achieved prominence and the regularity of publication decreased.

The actual issues known to have been published are:

1949:   2: May, October
1950:  3: January, May, October
1951:  3: February, June, October
1952:  3: February, July, October
1953:  2: April, August
1954:  3: January, May, November
1955:  2: May and October
1956:  2: March, September
1957:  2: January, July
1958:  2: January, July
1959:  2: January, October
1960:  2: March, December
1961:  1: December
1963:  1: December
1964:  1: March

This gives a total of 31 issues ranging from 24 to 32 pages, the average being 28.

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Ffestiniog Slate Part 3 - A whole Community of jobs
Snowdonia
Samuel Holland’s Diary Part 2
Gifts from Overseas
“Caban” salutes Cyril Williams

May 1950
Ffestiniog Slate Part 4 - Off They Go!
Inspecting, Loading and transporting slates
A famous Welshman greets Caban
Scouts visit the Quarries
Samuel Holland’s Diary Part 3
Look No Joints!

October 1950
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“A‘weddi Mis”
Dust Extraction
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The Maya called it “Caban”
Samuel Holland’s Diary Part 4
Looking Down from Tuxford

February 1951
Winning the Slate
The Big Snow
“With Compliments from the Netherlands”
“Smit”
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Tippers’ View
Books
Chairman’s Message
50 years ago

June 1951
Royal and Ancient Craft of Slatemaking
The work of the Millmen
Keeping out the Rain
Votty Hydrostat installation
Oakeley and the Festival
Origins of Slate - 2
Glimpse of the Past

October 1951
Pumping and Power
Royal Visit to Oakeley
Aerial Photographs
Oakeley from the Air
Origins of Slate - 3

February 1952
Stop Look and Listen
The work of the Securers
First Footer at Oakeley
Beddgelert Marchers mapped a route
Votty from the Air
Aerial photographs
Eisteddfod Caban K
Queen Elizabeth R
Official portrait of the new Queen

July 1952
Check and Counter-Check
The work of the Surveyors
Quarries in their Setting
The Quarry Choir at work
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Our First Aid experts
Men of Parts
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Caban discipline

October 1952
Out on the Beat
The work of the Under Managers
Security for Securers
Votty’s biggest Fall
3,000 tons came down Overnight
This ‘Taffy’ is truly Welsh
Caban Q
Oakeley Quarry Bus Station
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Men of Parts  
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August 1953  From Floor to Floor part 2  Underground at Oakeley & Votty
January 1954  From Floor to Floor Part 3  The Middle Distances / Going Down at Oakeley
The Blaenau Ffestiniog Mining District  
Caban Pictures at the National Museum  
The Lower levels

May 1954  From Floor to Floor Part 4  Nearing the Bottom
Workaday Scene  
The Timberman

November 1954  From Floor to Floor Part 5  From Floor P to Q in Oakeley
Our Visitors  
Glimpse of the Past

May 1955  From Floor to Floor Part 6  Production!
Checking the Main Drain at Oakeley  
Blocks for the Diamond Saw  
The Product of the Day

October 1955  From Floor to Floor Part 7  Concluded
In the footsteps of the Quarryman Artist  
In the footsteps of the Quarryman Artist

March 1956  Minister of Works at Oakeley  
Slate Pipe with Totem Carvings  
Votty’s “Janet Jones”  
Musical Slate Makers  
Securer’s Ladder

September 1956  Grand Old lady of Plas Tanybwlch  
Rendez-vous in America  
Presentations to Votty Old-Timers  
Studies in expression  
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Slate for River Defence Work  
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100 Years old and good for another century  
Re-using slates

January 1957  New Year Message  
Birmingham eyes on Welsh Slate  
From Mine to Mill  
Studies in expression  
Oakeley Staff 1956 & 1890’s  
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Oakeley Staff 1956 & 1890’s

July 1957  Minister of Welsh Affairs at Oakeley  
Piping Water through bomb-cases  
Retirement of Mr C.G.Dobson  
Studies in Expression  
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Power from the Air Grid  
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Men and Machines Against water  
Drainage on the Bon  
Trio with 120 years service  
Underground at Oakeley - through a woman’s eyes  
Farewell to a veteran  
Repairing a high level bridge  
They met in Malaya  
The Quarries in their Setting - Votty Panorama  
Studies in Expression |
| July 1958   | Festival of Wales Greeting  
Obituary R.M.C. Howard  
Lord Brecon in Slate Country  
Ringing the changes  
Flexibility & the gentle touch  
Quarrymen Councillors at Oakeley  
Studies in expression  
Long Service at Votty |
| January 1959 | Tenth Anniversary  
Mayor of Swansea with the Slatemakers  
Museum Spot for Quarry Tools  
Drill for Every Job  
Demonstration by Candle-Light  
After a Visit to Oakeley  
50 Years Ago  
Wales festival Scenes at Blaenau Ffestiniog  
Oakeley’s Wild Goats caught by our Cameraman  
Studies in Expression - Caban Lefal Galed  
(Oakeley)  
Between Ourselves |
| October 1959 | Roofing Contractors at the Oakeley Quarries  
Studies in Expression - Caban Mawr (Votty)  
A geological sidelight  
Television Cameras at Oakeley  
Old but not Forgotten  
Parting gift to Votty Inspector  
Ornamental Slating  
Bowler-hatted and moustached  
Old Votty workmen |
| March 1960  | Obituary - Sir Charles Oakeley  
A good piece of rock  
Studies in Expression - Caban N and O (Oakeley)  
Oakeley Slates for Shell’s new London H.Q.  
A Glance back  
Porthmadoc Shipping  
Loco Kidbrooke  
Old workmen at Penybont Mill |
| December 1960 | Chairman of Directors - Q.V. Hoare, OBE  
Slates for Holland’s Rijksmuseum  
Away from the Board Room  
Glance Back to penybont  
Quarry Inspector in Nigeria  
Slates for Town and Country homes  
Termau’r Chwarel (Oakeley)  
Quarry Terms - a dictionary in Welsh and English  
In the Heart of the Mountain  
Studies in Expression - Caban Llygad Coch (Votty)  
Old Robey |
December 1961
Obituary - Mr Harry Cutts
Slate and Its extraction
Y barics
Studies in Expression - Bone Coedan (Oakeley)
Pen y cei
Message from the Chairman
Termau’r Chwarel - Part 2
Place for Welsh Slate in Guildford Cathedral
Product of a Quarryman’s skill
Bone Coedan - 40 years ago

February 1963
Flexibility of Slate
Welsh Roofs in Cambridge
Safety Health & Welfare
Winning Slate Underground
Sculpture in Slate and Steel
Machine for Slate Making
Votty Quarrymen and Staff
Termau’r Chwarel - Part 3 -conclusion
Engine for an Enthusiast
Lunchtime in the mine - Caban N
Parting Gift to Pensioner
New Diamond Saw
Closure
Kidbrooke leaves

March 1964
Sir Keith Joseph meets the Slate-Makers
From the Records of the Oakeley Hospital
Opening a New Chamber
After the Mid-day Break - Caban k
Searchlight in Miniature
Our Four Octagenarian Pensioners
Ceremony at Erw Fair
Blue Hard and Yellow Band
The veins of slate

This document compiled by Graham Isherwood