

Health and Safety

The North Wales slate quarries were extremely dangerous places. Between 1883 and 1892, out of a workforce of some 8,500 men, 116 men lost their lives in accidents. At Penrhyn, between 1826 and 1875, 258 fatalities were recorded. The introduction of blast shelters, fixed firing times and alarms dramatically improved quarry safety. However, horrific

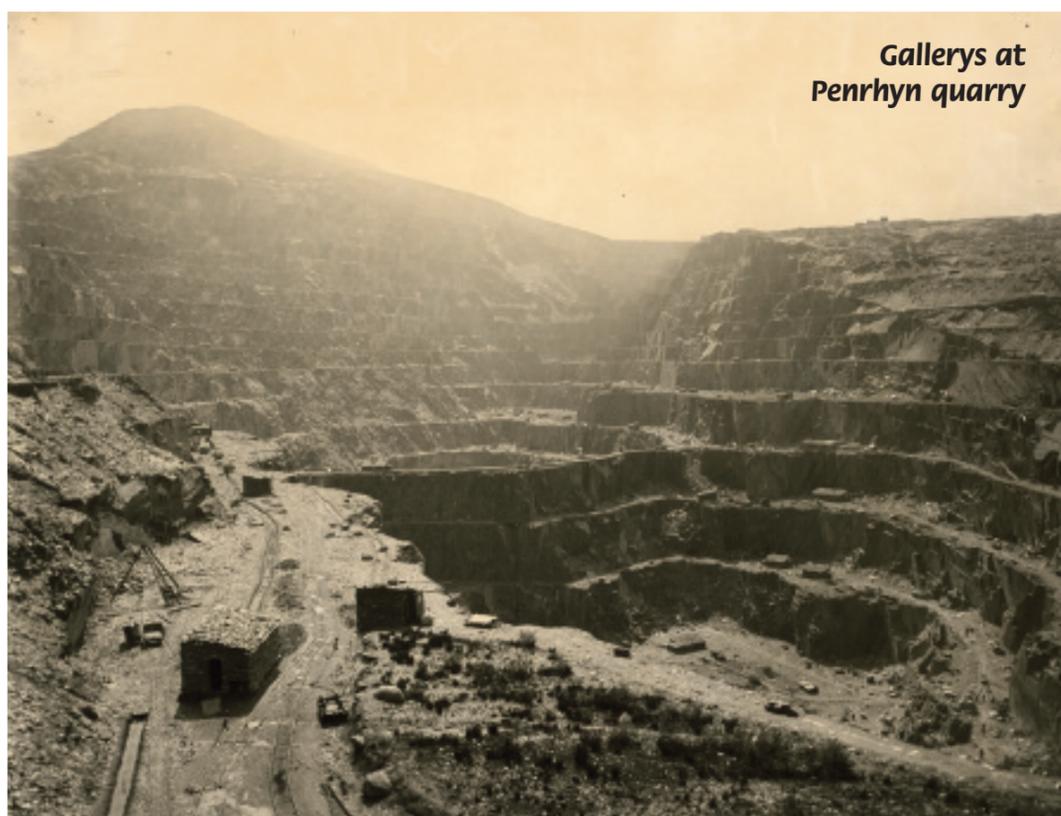
accidents from shot firing were still routine. All this firing of dynamite meant that the rock was unstable and would fall without warning, burying men alive and sweeping them over the edge of the galleries. The quarry had its own hospital, and was a pioneer in the use of anaesthetics.

The quarrymen suffered from chronic respiratory diseases. Slate makers appear to have suffered more than those working in other parts of the quarry. While the work was less physically demanding than the rockmen, slate dust was worse here than elsewhere, making the average age of death as low as 47.9 years. The



Drilling by hand on a platform at Penrhyn quarry, 1913

risks associated with slate dust was not dealt with until the 1930s when attempts were made to reduce exposure to dust and the link between lung disease and the quarryman's working environment was recognised. The quarry hospitals were started by the quarry owners, but they were largely funded by



Galleries at Penrhyn quarry

the workers paying 1s a week in return for free medical care and money to cover absence from work caused by injury. The diet of the quarrymen was extremely poor, they seem to have survived on tea and bread and butter. There was little meat and no vegetables in their diet.

THE SLATE TRAIL

Follow 'The Slate Trail' along Lôn Las Ogwen, where you can find a series of information boards recounting the unique story of Ogwen slate, Penrhyn Quarry and the people involved in its production.