

COLLYWESTON AND ITS TRADE

Something that's been going on in this village for hundreds of years - a trade that is known all over the country and even in America.

The picture we're looking at is known as a foxhole in the trade, and when you're working down the quarry you say you're going down the foxhole to work. Foxes don't normally go down in that hole, they live in the side, clefts in the rock. You can always smell if there's been one down there. As you'll see Collyweston is built on stone. There's only roughly about ten inches of soil, and then you get four or five feet of crash or kale as we call it, no earthly good nowadays because in the olden days it was used for roadmaking, but of course there's different materials used now. Then just below that you get a thin layer of Collyweston sand, or Northamptonshire sand as the geological people call it, and you'll notice that you get those shell-like objects, which are known as pot lids, and they were the first source of slate because they were nearer the top of the ground and they were more or less soft and they split easy. They didn't need the forest, they more or less split on their own accord. It's a similar sort of thing as the Stonesfield slate in Oxfordshire. Then below that you get about four or five feet of solid limestone, and that forms the ceiling of the quarry, a very level ceiling which is a feature of that particular quarry. Unfortunately the floor is sand and when you're working down in a quarry you don't shift any more sand than you can help, as long as you can get along, but it does restrict the height for working, about 5'6". In odd places you can stand upright, and when you're working down a quarry they always say you want to be broke in the back or have a permanent orick in your neck because you have to walk with your head on one side. Anyway you get used to it after a few reminders from the ceiling. Below the ceiling level, and we work to a sort of a face, and it's more like coal mining, and from the ceiling down to the floor (about 5'6") it's made of a soft limestone near the ceiling which we call pudden. It's a sort of a stone that's soft; you can knock a hole through it and can't break it. And then below that there is a layer of blue rag, a very hard stone known in the trade as bastard, and the only use for that is to break it up and build pillars to hold up the ceiling. And all the waste stone and sand is used for backing up behind you where you work, to help support the ceiling. Over the years those pillars, although they're made of the hardest of all rocks they do tend to split. It's the pressure from above of course.

The idea is you work under the face in the front of you, and you work to natural cuts in the stone, which one from the left and one from the right... it's like putting a cut in a big cake at two angles, and it's a similar sort of thing in stone. If you can imagine working under a large table, and the slate and that is above the table top, and then you're burrowing underneath the table, which is the sand, and as you burrow under, or fox as we call it, using foxing pecks... a long-handled single peck or pick... you peck away at the sand and burrow underneath, and as you go you set up some little stone pillars all along the front which are wedged up tight and as you go under you set up some small pillars, or even wooden props and all the time you're working underneath, or in fact outside too, you tap the ceiling. It's similar to a railway man, tapping the ceiling, as tapping the wheels of a railway engine to see if they're cracked, and it's the same sort of thing. You can tell if there's any piece of stone on the move, or whether it's off, as we call it, and if you find that, you put a prop under it or a stone pillar, and you burrow underneath that till you get where the two cuts meet, or thereabouts, and all the time you're on the listen, because when you get it undermined you're more or less taking away its support, although you've got props under, but they tend to sink a bit and you get various little cracks and particularly on the small pillars set along the front where they're wedged up with little bits of shale, or thin slate, and you get these little clicks and that's a sure sign that you're getting the weight as we call it. That means that the portion of rock and slate above you is on the move, and the ideal is to knock your props out last thing

at night and hope that next morning that you've had a fall. That means the log and the stone above has come away from the ceiling. We call it a fall in the trade. At the same time as you're knocking your props out you're all the while listening for - we call it 'talking', which is actually rending of one piece from the other - its pulling away, and we call it talking, and when you get knocked out you listen for that and let it hang there. Its rather a frightening experience because well, there's perhaps a couple of hundred ton hanging on the ceiling, and you stand against one of these pillars that we erect, and, well, they're your safety precaution. Even they have been known to go off with a bang, and that means that the weight's pulling on the ceiling and its causing the pressure on the pillars and it really is something - not everybody likes it, but you get used to it, and when it does leave, when you get the fall, there's an almighty silence afterwards and you just sit there and say "thank you very much". Otherwise if it doesn't come away we have to insert large wedges at ceiling level and use a 14lb or even a 16lb hammer to drive the wedges in. Its what we call savage amusement. Its really hard work because you can't really get a proper swing at it, but its something else that you get used to, and if there's one or two of you as can use one of these things it does help. Well then when the fall drops what you have to do is to test your ceiling above you to see if any of that has moved, and if you think its off you clear away and erect another stone pillar, because that's what you depend on for your own safety.

Well then you start to break up your fall, sorting out the rubbish, which is used for walling, and the bastard, which you break up in as large pieces as possible to build the pillars, and all this is thrown behind you and is walled up to help support the ceiling. Well then you come to the slate which is usually the bottom layer, and of course its the last bit to get at. You've got to shift all the top to get at the bottom. Then you break up the slate, or the log as we call it, in as large pieces as you can manage. You don't actually lift anything down there. You move it about by walking, which is you keep swinging one corner round then the other, and scooting it up on another piece of stone until you get where you want to be. Its the same when you're erecting pillars except for the small pieces at the top which you have to lift in to tighten up. The log is then broken up and its wheeled out as we call it on a flat barrow which we call a shim. You load the log on the wheel and the handles of the shim are for steering, and you just trot along those passages and out to the entrance to the quarry or the foxhole. Years ago they used to have walk-down quarries, sloping, sort of a ramp, and they used to use horses and sometimes they used to sledge it out if it was possible, otherwise they used to have a little horse and cart and the cart was known as the log-cart, and the horse used to go down there and you loaded him up and he took it up to the top.

Well then when you got it on the top it was laid out in sort of a rough crazy paving, and to get frosted. Some quarries had windlasses like a double-ended well-roller with a handle at each end, and if you get nodded at that handle all day and perhaps raise 40 or 50 ton of slate it gives you an appetite for your tea. Anyway you get it up on the top and it is the action of the frost working on the natural sap in the log that splits it along the vein. The log is an oolitic limestone. Its fissile, which means its split along the plane or vein as we call it. You do get major clives or veins in which enables you to split it up into say something about 6" wide, thick, or even less and of course it depends on what you're quarrying. Sometimes you hit a bit of rough, as we call it, and another time you get a bit of kind, and stone is like wood. If its straight grained its split fairly easily, and if its got a twist in it, or a knot in, it doesn't go too well, therefore you get it in as large pieces as you can, because you're not always certain that you'll get it frosted, and its go off the same size as the log. The ideal is to get it out in the afternoon and a jolly good frost at night to take action, and then four or five to follow on - what we call ribbers, to make

keep it wet, particularly the edges, not so much the top, the edges, and if it's a drying day or even a drying night you've got to be there and watch it. Nowadays you can get modern sprinklers, but even then they're not a hundred per cent, because if the wind changes during the night it blows the water the opposite way to where you want it very often. If you've got a large lot of log laid out it means that there's two of you. One has to draw or pump the water out of the pump or draw the water out of the well and his mate, he's drawing away for dear life to keep the tank full and his mate's chucking it away, so to speak...a bit Irish, but that's it. If during the night you feel that it's beginning to get a bit slippery, well that's what you're hoping and praying for, because as soon as it starts to get iced over as we call it, then you can leave it and go back to bed. In my time we used to have to be up all night watering and you were expected to be at work the next morning just the same. It was also done for just the love of the job. Even at weekends there was no extra pay, it was accepted as part of the job.

You want about a dozen good slates. It just depends on whether its good kind or if its rough. Some of it's got a lot of blue in it which is a clay, a compressed clay. It takes a lot more frost, its a lot harder. You get similar sort of slate to this running up through the country from Somerset, Gloucestershire Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and even up into top end of Derbyshire and Yorkshire. It's all a similar sort of thing although the others are a bit on the softer side, and they don't need the frost to split, and Collyweston is about one of the highest points, and it's some of the hardest, in fact I think it is the hardest of slate in my experience, and when it was first quarried at Collyweston it was found as an outcrop on the hillside, and in Collyweston there's, oh, several dozens of little bits of land that was sort of fenced off. They was walled off because all the waste stone from quarries that wasn't needed down below they used to bring up on the top and built walls. There's miles of stone walls round Collyweston and they're all waste from the slate quarries. Some is slate that never got frosted. Each little bit of land, about 2 acres, belonged to different men, and most of the quarry owners were connected with agriculture. They sort of worked the quarries in the wintertime and got the slate out and got it frosted, and then they sold it to the larger firms and in the summertime they used to farm the land on the top, grow barley and turnips. I can remember a lot of them in my time. In my time too there was possibly twelve pits working in the wintertime and about forty or fifty men. The farmers, if they couldn't do any work on the farm they used to send their men down to act as labourers, and with the guidance of the odd skilled man that's how they got the slate out. It was accepted as a job for the winter.

That gives you an idea of the formation of the rock Collyweston is built on.

That also shows you. We invested in a little motor hoist to hoist our log to the top. We erected a bit of tubular scaffolding and a motor hoist, which is very easy. Its one of the few mechanical aids used in a quarry. The gentleman we are looking at belonged to the Geological Museum from London, who took most of the photographs or the film we're looking at. It shows you the pot lid as I was telling you about and there's also one or two round to the left not shown on this film. Now when you get log frosted the next thing is to clive it, which means split it along the vein and you follow the natural cracks in the stone round with a cliving hammer, which has two sharp ends, and you usually have one you keep fairly sharp to start your cracks with, then once you get it going you use 'tother end. And then you split it off and its all clove or clived as we call it and stacked in a heap, and then the next process you have a dressing hammer, which has three or four purposes. It has a sharp end one end for cutting

It has a flat side which we use for dressing and shaping the slate and at t'other end we have ...it has claws which is used for dressing the slate, that is shaping. Normally you straighten up one side and then you square the bottom off and then straighten the other side. You don't - - Collyweston slate is not like a blue slate or a tile. Its not square headed, its random in shape and that is where the art of Collyweston slating comes in, putting the slates on to make the roof watertight. Its quite a tricky job. Nowadays in modern times the roof is felted for insulation purposes, and very often as a sort of insurance against the rainholes, but when I was younger if you did a new roof and it rained in after you's done it it was a crime, and no one would admit that they's done that particular roof if they had to go back again to it. But of course you can break a slate when you're working on a roof and naturally you come in for - there is a risk - but normally once the roof's done it should last a lifetime, and even more. I might say at this stage hat I've had 52 years in the trade. I'm still connected. I've three men working. My own family as far as we know have been in the village about 500 years or more, according to old available records, and as far as we know they were connected with the trade. I know my grandfather's father, he was down in the old records as an innkeeper at the Blue Bell. There's also another one a man named Bird - he was a shoemaker, but he owned a quarry and there's a field along Stamford Road known as Bird's Close, which used to belong to this particular cobbler. So it was more or less shared out. Everybody had a bit of land, and if they could they used to quarry it, and in old records they used to pay a sort of a tithe to the church, or to the manor landlord, which in the case of Collyweston was the Lord Exeter of Burghley House.

When you get the slate dressed they're set up in heaps again, and then it used to be the boy's job to put a hole in the head of a slate. He used a tool with a wooden handle made of box, usually turned at King's Cliffe years ago, and he also had a bill which actually was an old file which the local blacksmith he drew it out as we call it into a fairly fine point, and it had four shoulders to the point. It was like a square, set diamond way on, and these were fitted into the bill helve, and if you notice the next picture you hold the slate at an angle and you strike the slate with the point of your bill, also at an angle. You don't peck straight through it...try and shoot little bits out. We call it spalshing, and the little bits fly out, and then when you get...you feel the point go through, you turn your handle and you sort of rime the hole out. You can get a hole as big as you like by just turning your wrist, and turn the handle and that's how it's done. That shows the actual hole made. You can get them as big as you like. Of course years ago they wanted bigger holes because they were fitted - they, the slates, were hung on the roof with wooden pegs. Well nowadays we use nails of various types. It just depends what is specified by the architect, mostly sheridized nails, but in years gone by we used to have brass nails, copper nails, gunmetal nails, galvanized nails, but nowadays most of them are sheradized. It's similar to a galvanize. And then when you get your slates holed they're set up in heaps, and a heap is a slater's thousand, which is like a baker's dozen. It isn't very accurate, there isn't a 1000 slates in but its known as a 1000. There's so many case of slate and a case of slate is three. and you put in so many case to a heap, and a heap is supposed to cover roughly two square. A square in slater's measurement is ten feet by ten feet... a hundred square feet, and when you go to a job you find out how many square of roofing there is and you take so many heaps of slate to do that. If it's a twenty square job you want ten heaps of slate. It just depenas on what you want. And then when you get them on the job - that picture shows the heaps of the slate - when you get them on the job you find out the depth of the roof with a rod, and then you part your slates up, using a slater's rule with a lot of marks, and a lot of weird names. I'll just run them through starting from the bottom, the shortest slate, which is six inches from the bottom of the slate to the hole, is known as an even mope, and you go in this fashion: even mope, large mope, even mumford, large mumford, even job, large job, even short, large short, ~~even long 'un, large long 'un, ven longback shortback, long shortback,~~

short, even long 'un, large long 'un, even shortback, large shortback, even middleback, large middleback, even longback, large longback, and then in inches, bachelors, whibbets, twelves, fourteens, sixteens, eighteens, inbows, outbows, short tens, middle tens and long tens, and I usually say #1 if you can repeat it. Its something you learn and never forget. Its another thing that's been handed down from father to son over hundreds of years, and in my younger days a slater wouldn't let you even touch his rule. He'd sooner break it or set fire to it than let anybody handle it, or he wouldn't even tell them the names, but in modern days with going to shows and TV programmes, and people writing books everybody knows the names, although they can't use a stick.

You get the depth of the roof with a rod, and then you part your slates up into the various sized, and starting with the largest slates at the bottom you work it all out. We set the work out on this rod and that is the guide for the fixing of the slate battens, and if you set it right the hole of the slate should come to the middle of the batten, which is the battens are set on. You have to allow for lap, which is the lap of the first slate on the head of the third slate, and Collyweston being not square headed you have to marry your slates in so as you can get the most watertight job. Where a slate has a little bit missing on the side, one side, we call it a wing shoulder, we have little bits of shale which we insert over the head of the slate below, which makes a watertight job. That's one of the tricks and the secrets of the trade. Of course nowadays with felt, they tend to run it a bit. Then when you get all the slates sorted out into the lengths, and you get your laths fixed, then you fix the slates to the roof, starting with the big ones at the bottom, and that is why when you're quarrying you get as large as you can because if you've got a very deep roof you want as long a slate as you can get, and as large a slate as you can get to get a start away from the bottom, as we call it, and as you go up to the top you finish up with a, possibly, a six inch slate in dimension courses, perhaps anything from two foot six inches long. The normal slate is roughly two feet but you can get them two foot six inches or even three feet long if you're lucky, and that's why the big slates are important. It helps you to get up the roof a bit, and then according to how your slates run out when you parted them up if there's a lot of one sort you perhaps go two or three courses across the roof or even three or even four, especially in the shorter ones, and there is one thing peculiar to a Collyweston, they're bedded with a lime mortar. Years ago it used to be the Collyweston lime, which was burnt and slaked and then knocked up with a thrall, which was a long handle with a steel pin on the end, and you used to thrash this mortar and use so much water on it, and keep thrashing until you made it sort of a - like a lump of butter, and it really would stand up on its own...wonderful mortar. If we have to take any slates off an old roof we can always tell if it was Collyweston lime because it does take some snifting. It more or less goes back to its normal state - its original state. Nowadays we use a lime mortar with a little bit of cement added as a setting agent, and Collyweston slates were bedded just up the vertical joint and along the horizontal joint - not a lot - just enough to make the slates lay fairly even. And also in original days...and Collyweston's on a hill...and when they started it helped to keep out drifting snow. Well nowadays with using felt they don't bother to point them, they just spot bed them and the felt does the job, but it's a job we don't like, not the real tradesmen. We like it pointed up and well cut back as we call it, it makes a better job.

Years ago they used to hang the slates with wooden pegs, oak pegs, and the lath as we call it was riven oak. The oak, my father used to tell me, used to come from King's Cliffe at a timber yard there, and it was a job in the winter when they wasn't quarrying slates to rive this oak down to make the battens and of course in those days there was no nails as we know them to-day, they were handmade nails made by the blacksmith, more or less pins. Nowadays of course there's four or five hundred different varieties of nails. We use nails and Thorn imported lath, deal lath, usually treated with Protom or some other preservative, but in the olden days it was just the ordinary riven lath fixed with blacksmith's made nails. and the slates were hung to these laths. And

even the roof timbers, they were pegged together, because there wasn't any nails big enough, just the odd ones, but if you look at an old roof you can see where they'll be pegged together. If you go to one of the Department of the Environment, or Ministry of Works as it used to be called, on the ancient monuments you can see this. You can see this work where the roof's all pegged together. No nails were allowed. Nowadays its quicker to use nails and nail them to the ordinary imported lath. Also years ago they used to fix a stone ridging...ridged, and that used to come from Weldon, and they used to fetch it in a horse and cart or a waggon or a trolley, and it was sawn, another job that used to be done in the wintertime. And also they used to make clay ridge tiles at Peterborough, Whittlesea, even at Stamford, which more or less matched the colour of the slating. Nowadays we're coming down to concrete, concrete and stone don't really mix, its something that's artificial.

Methods of transport have altered in my time. They used to borrow the farmer's waggons and horses, and cart the slates to wherever the job. They'd perhaps be gone a week if the journey was thirty or forty miles away. They used to go so many miles a day and then put up at the local pub, and then go on and take the load, and also come back, and it was a well-known fact that the horses always came back quicker than they went. I know they was loaded but once a horse got his nose pointed to home he was ina hurry to get back home. And of course so was the driver. If you had a job a long way off you used to take the slates down to the nearest railway station and load them in trucks. For instance if you was doing a job at Oxford you'd load the slates on a Wednesday and then go on the following Monday hoping the slates had arrived. Its only about 72 miles from Collyweston, but it used to take three or four days, and then when you'd got them there you had to get somebody to cart them from the station up to the colleges, or wherever the job was, which meant a lot more handling, and then you had to sort out and carry out as I've told you before. Well nowadays you can put slates on a lorry and you can be there in two hours, and if it was possible you could have some of them on the same day, but it just shows you how methods of transport have changed in the last fifty years. Also, as a boy we had to cycle to work, and we was expected to be there at seven o'clock in the morning, perhaps have to cycle twelve miles, and if you was late you got into trouble, and in my own time we used to put in about 47½ hours a week, and I was putting slates on for the princely sum of twelve shillings per week for 47½ hours, which works out at about twopence an hour, or something like that. Nowadays they want twice that pay for one hour's work, and if a motor's not there to take them they don't go to work.

There's many fine old buildings about the country covered with Collyweston slate. I might add that the Collyweston area, in fact Northamptonshire and a little bit of Lincolnshire and Rutland was an area that was richly endowed with everything it needed for house building. It had its stone quarries all the way round - Wansford, Barnack, Helpton, Weldon, Clipsham, Ketton - all good building stone. It had its timber, because it was a forest area. It had its limestone, which they used to burn for its mortar. It had its sand quarries. It had its clay for brickmaking and ridge tile making - in fact - and it had Collyweston slate which went well with the stonework, and some of the finest buildings in the country, especially the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, have been done with Collyweston slate. It's travelled up as far as Wick, beyond Wick in Scotland, and down to Land's End, all over the country, and it even went to America on one occasion. My father went to do the job. Andrew Carnegie, the founder of the Carnegie Trust Fund was a Scot. He went to America and started the iron and steel works out there, and he also had an English partner, a man named Phipps, who after a time and when he'd made some money had an English house built, and the material went from the Collyweston-Stamford area, and the slates went from Collyweston, and my father and another man went to put them on. When they got there they wouldn't let them work because it was imported labour, union trouble, even in those days. Anyway the Yanks came along and took one look at this heap of rubbish and walked away, and eventually father and his mate were allowed to fix them. Sometime after a lady sent my father a photograph of this house, Phipps' Mansion, which he kept for a long time, and then we had it developed in black and white and recently at a craft exhibition in Stamford a lady came to me and she said

I was there three weeks ago". She'd been to America, and she said "I was sure that was Collyweston slate", and she enquired of the curator - its not a museum - and he told her that the slates came from Rutlandshire. Well of course there's no slate place as Rutlandshire, and get ally they came from Collyweston, and she got me some postcards or pictures of this place, which is now a public museum and a place to park ground. It sort of made my day after 76 years - it had been done 76 years ago, and to think it was still there was something that I felt rather proud of. Collyweston itself as a small village - it never had until recently a population of more than 400 - but it also was well-known for its pubs. It had seven pubs, and I'm afraid the slaters in the olden days were well known for their - not only for their slating work but also for their beer drinking capacities. It was a well-known thing for some of them to have a day or even a week on the beer till they run out of money, and then they had to start to work.

Collyweston stands on one of the highest points in Northamptonshire. It also had a palace many hundred years ago. You can still see the old barn and the palace garden, and fish ponds below, and in the palace garden there is a sundial which is a very good example. There is also one on a house near the church gates, but it is supposed to be - it's not accurate. Underneath it said "I ray for no man". The main village street used to lead down to the main entrance and there's some very old houses down there dating back to 1612 or even earlier. The New Road, such as we call it now didn't exist. It was done in my grandfather's time when men were out of work were set to work on making that New Road, which connected the main street with the Back Lane. They also constructed the present Ketton Road down to the bridge which went so far down to where there's a small plantation of fir trees and then went off to the left to the fields we know as the Rabbit Burrows, but it was considered to be too much of a pull so the present Ketton Road was constructed.

One of the beauties of Collyweston slating are their turned valleys. In the Cotswolds they call them lace valleys, ~~XXXX~~ but they're constructed differently. Now a turned valley is where one roof intersects with another, and you have to form a valley to carry the water. Its formed by a centre slate, which is known as a gutterstone, and it has 2 slates, one each side, a left and a right, which are twisted, known as sidestones, to make the sweep in the valley. Its one of the tricky bits of slating, and its really attractive.

Down Collyweston street, just below where Mr Astin lives there were four or five old cottages which was pulled down many years ago and rebuilt, and it shows the vertical slating to the dormer windows. The only thing with that, it has no front door. There's only one door to each house and they're at the back, so the front door's at the back so to speak, but that's a bit of...well, some of the newest or latest work in Collyweston slate.

END OF SIDE 1

A lot of our work over this last thirty years has been at Boughton House near Kettering, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, and it's a tremendous place - acres of slating, in fact I once said to the late Duke, I was talking about roofs, and I said normally we measure a roof by the square, which is ten foot by ten foot, but I said when we come to Boughton we always say we've got so many acres to do. It's a terrific great place and he never forgot it, and if I ran into him he'd say "How many acres this time Mr Osborn". Really it's one of the largest houses in the area - a wonderful sight because there's a lot of stonework, a terrific lot of lead work, and great big timbers in the roofs, and then of course its clad with Collyweston slating, and the ridges are all leadwork. Its going to be open to the public in 1976, and being well, and the stable block, which we're looking at now, is going to be converted into toilets and refreshment rooms and what have you. The feature of the stable block is that if the weather was bad they could exercise the horses inside without coming outside.

Now the section of roof we're looking at there is what we call a mansard roof. It has a vertical piece between the dormer windows, and then another roof on the

top above the lead roll, and the section we're looking at now is known as the High Pavilion, which is mainly the Duke's quarters, and on the lefthand side is the State rooms. Now the story is that there's two wings stand out like the High Pavilion and the one on the other side is known as the Unfinished Wing, which has all the top rooms complete but there's not a middle floor in, and it used to be a joke, and if you asked any of the estate men where they were working they used to say the Unfinished Wing. The state rooms contain a very fine painted ceiling - I don't know if its Verdi or Verrio - he sort of laid on his back and painted this, a wonderful ceiling. There's three in Boughton House, one in the Egyptian Hall and one in another small hall but the one in the state room, its a real beauty, and that was a piece that was built on by the first John Montagu - one of the Buccleuch family. They changed the name eventually by marriage, but John Montagu, he was the Queen's representative abroad. I think it was in the time of the first Queen Elizabeth. He was commissioned to buy fine pictures and tapestries, and whatnot for the reigning monarch, and he bought them but he kept a lot of them for himself, and for his sins he was found out and he was banished to Boughton, and he started to build the North Front which includes the State rooms and the Unfinished Wing at the lefthand end and the High Pavilion at the right. It has a lot of colonnade underneath and it's one of the side entrances to the house itself.

The house has 52 chimneys, it has 12 entrances, and it has a window for each day of the year, which is another feature. It has dozens of dormer windows and a terrific lot of lead work. It's a day's march to get up to the place. I was talking to Her Grace one day and she was talking about the good work we'd done there and how it was admired, and I happened to say "Yes, when I first came to Boughton I was scared of the place", and she said "You scared of Boughton Mr Osborn", and I said "Yes, but", I said "I've been coming here for nearly thirty years. I come here like coming home, and that quite pleased her, but I've got used to it and I know every inch of the roof now, but its a terrific place. I once counted my steps from down below to where I was working on a section of the roof and there was 432 steps to where I wanted to be before I could start work. That's another section of the roof part of Boughton. the lefthand section is the Dower House, which is the home of the - Sir David and Lady Scott. Sir David was a cousin of the late Duke. Behind it was the old Brewhouse where they used to brew the beer. In years gone by they used to work for about a penny a day and so many pints of beer and then in between was the Steward's House, and in the forefront is Aida Villas where the children sleep when the families are there. The section we're looking at now, its the West Front, and the roof, the left hand corner running away from us is the library, and the little roof running away from us is over what they call the Flower Gallery. That's on the West Front.

That picture shows how slates are laid on. Actually that wasn't at Boughton it was at Cundle on the old rectory, the house of the River Board, the Anglia Water Board nowadays. And then that shows you again the Mansard roofs and those lead rolls. When you first go there and you have to walk along that lead roll there isn't a lot of flat, and there's a drop of about sixty feet, its a bit tricky, but once you get used to it you can trot along there. It doesn't bother you at all except when it's windy. That shows you it running away from you. There's very little flat - but that's over the State Rooms and going away to the Aida Villas and the Dower House.

That shows you the various courses, how they're laid on and how they're graded. You start with the big ones and you get the smaller ones at the top.

Now this is Cundle School. This is a gay-ze-bo or gazebo - just depends what school you went to, but they were erected usually on the outside wall of a town or a village and they were used as look-out towers by the ladies. They used to go up there and watch for their husbands or sweethearts coming back from wither hunting or from battle. There's two at Cundle. The feature of that one its a square - starts off at a square base to the roof and finishes up with a round top. It's one of the trickiest bits of slating we've had to do, but we've done it. And that is the Cundle School Chapel, which was done just before I started. I was working but I wasn't there. The father was working there. The mother was

roof we have to look later.

When I went back to Boughton again it shows Sir David and Lady Scott's garden. Now when I first went to there that was known as the wilderness, and the late Lady Scott and Sir David set to to make it into a garden. Sir David Scott is an authority on shrubs and they started to form a garden. Unfortunately Lady Scott died and a few years ago he married Valerie Finnis, who is the world's expert in rockery and alpine plants, and she's a garden fanatic, and they've sort of made little walks among the trees and planted lots of shrubs, and they've got thousands of alpine plants and made little rockeries - it's really lovely to go to.

Now this is something different. This is the old 'X' at King's School at Grantham. It is where - it is part of the old King's School, and it's where Isaac Newton was it - the man who saw the apple drop off the tree - it's where he was educated. He was born just outside of Grantham, and on one of the windowsills inside he carved his name. When we was working there we got a lot of visitors. Also while we was working there the Duke of Edinburgh came to present his awards to all the school children in the area, which met on the school premises, and during the day he came up to where we were working - and the lawn...he planted a tree which was supposed to be a replica of the one that the gentleman saw the apple drop off - it was a Kentish - I can't remember the name of what it was but anyway the tree was planted, and he came and put a few spadeful of soil round it and we all stood round - not many people. I always remember him saying "If I know anything about this tree it'll be dead by the end of the week". Anyway, we had a scaffolding firm, they came to move the scaffolding from the street side into this garden, and when they'd finished, only the next day, one of the men pinched this tree and took it back to Nottingham, and they was able to trace it to where he lived, and found it in his garden. It cost him £25 for his trouble when he was summoned and the tree came back again. Also while I was there it was my birthday, and I'd been working at the trade for exactly 50 years, and I was pulling my chap's leg that the Duke of Edinburgh was coming to see me being as it was my birthday, and during the afternoon I went away from the job and I came back again and my chap said "We're having a party this afternoon" and the headmaster's wife and the cook of the school, they set a birthday party out on the lawn on the very table where the Duke had signed the book and I thought it was very nice of them, but it made my day and my fiftieth year in the trade.

That shows a modern bungalow on Stamford Road built of Stamford brick with a Collyweston roof.

That is some more sections of the Boughton House roof. As you can see there's all sorts and shapes and not a very good photograph.

Now this is one of the old pubs in Collyweston known as the Engineer Inn - not used nowadays. We only have one pub. It used to be the Slater's Arms but unfortunately the name's been changed to the Cavalier, and the Slater's Arms....but another thing, I don't know off-hand of a slater that uses pubs nowadays. They've gone teetotal for some reason or other.

Now the building we're looking at there is the Lyddington Bede Houses. It belonged to the Lord Exeter family. It was also a bishop's palace, connected with the Bishop of Lincoln, and the bottom rooms were sort of almshouses. The old people used to live in the sort of dungeon like places years ago. Well then the Ministry of Works took it over and they carried out a lot of building repairs, and we were asked to re-roof it. It's a lovely old building built of Lyddington stone, which is a sandstone - two or three different colours, various beds of stone. That's at Lyddington. And at the corner of the grounds of the Bedehouses there's another gazebo, conical in shape, which we re-slatted in 1975. And that's another picture looking at it from another way - quite attractive. It also shows a thatched roof in the distance. Lyddington has I think ever, roof under the sun, including Collyweston

Now this is the old Welsh House in Northampton. At the top right hand corner of the market they've done a re-development scheme, and in that corner was an old stone built house, known as the old Welsh House. When they pulled all the buildings down it was a condition that this house should be built in its original form. A very attractive looking building with a sort of bottle gable ends to the dormer windows. I think they're Flemish I understand in design and we were asked to re-slate it,

which we did in 1975. At the back of that is a concrete jungle, overhead car parks and shopping arcades and that. There's nothing very pretty in Northampton I would say. This is one of the best bits in Northampton. Not far away is a round church which is stone built and it's Collyweston slated, and I've worked on that in years gone by.

Now that is Caythorpe Court. It's near Cranwell in Lincolnshire. It was a private residence and it was slated by my grandfather as a young lad in the 1860s to 90s time. What we're looking at now is the stable block or the main clock tower and the stables ran each way three sides of a courtyard. Recently, in the last few years, it's been taken over by the Kesteven Agricultural College, and it has been converted into lecture blocks and student accommodation - a lovely building, and we've been connected with that place ever since it was built and we still - we was working there last year, just on the odd repairs. That's Caythorpe, near Cranwell.

Now we're looking at Triangular Lodge which is about eighteen miles from Collyweston. You go through Corby and it's the right hand side of Kettering. It was built by Thomas Tresham and the Treshams were one of the instigators of the Gunpowder Plot, and they lived - they had a house near Kettering known as Newton-le-Willows which also had a double dovecot, which is most unusual. It's a lovely bit of work. It's on the corner in the Duke of Buccleuch's estate, and we've re-roofed it before the DCM took it over and we re-roofed the Triangular Lodge for the MOW - the Ministry of Works then, and it's built in the shape of a triangle. And he had a sort of a religious mania, everything had to be built in a trinity of three. There's three of everything, windows, pinnacles, gables, doors - it's all done in three. And that is part of Rushton Hall where he used to live. It's a very old building. It dates back to 16.. I think it is. Its 1624. It's now the home of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and we have the care of that roof, and we was working there recently and there's lots of blind children there, and we often grumble about this, that ~~that~~ and the other but it was remarkable. Those children, although they were blind and couldn't see a thing, they was as happy as sandboys. It made you think a bit.

Now this is a bit of old Stamford, bottom of St. Martin's opposite the George Hotel. We re-roofed that building some years ago. It shows the dormers, which is a feature of Stamford, and a very old part of Stamford. It also shows you a bow windowed shop front, which is another bit of old Stamford.

Now that's taken from the other way on looking down the hill, and it shows you the old gibbet running across St Martin's with the George Hotel sign attached to it, and it shows the old shop - they've been there many years.

Now in this last year or two an attempt has been made to see if Collyweston slate could be split by artificial means, but the Building Research people at Watford have had a go - it took 'em over a year to produce a report and although they said they thought it could be done they couldn't say what they thought it would cost to do it or anything, and another firm - took them the log there to try and they also took some to the British Aircraft Corporation - they have special tools for testing metal under frosty and wintry conditions - and they didn't succeed. We - British Oxygen came to us and said could they have a try with liquid nitrogen. Well they certainly split it but they shattered it in all directions, so that was no good. Well then another gentleman came and he took it to a poultry freezing plant and they had a go, and he brought it back and it didn't seem very successful, but the bit we're looking at now was one of them, and I had a look at it one day and I thought, "Well I'm sure there's a clive in there" and I was able to produce one or two slates, and I dressed them up and held them and produced the first two slates to be made by artificial means. In the meantime I also got a couple of bits of log and I - with or without my wife's permission - I put it in the deep freeze, and I in'd and out'd it for every three or four hours and put it under the hot tap and put it back again in polythene bags, and I was lucky enough to produce - it worked really well. Whether it'll be developed or not we don't know. The Men of the Stones of Stamford, are co-operating with the trade, and also Mr Bernard Fielding, the well-known architect. He's doing what he can to form a trust to preserve the Collyweston trade, and if possible to get government help to keep the trade going also stone-masons and all the other rural crafts. But

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costly or not is to be seen.

The piece we're looking at is a piece done by the normal freezing which we quarried in 1967. You can see the clives in that. Mind you that was a bit of kind. It was fairly straight-grained, and if that wouldn't split well nothing would. And now I'm just indicating some slates that I split by artificial means. And that shows the size of the slates. That one in particular is about three feet six inches tall and about twenty-four or twenty-six inches wide, and you can also see the various fossils in - bits of shell. Unfortunately that's got broken.

Now that's the finish of my story.

Robert Osborn
Collyweston
April 1976

Noble
15 Dyke
Bourne