

SEEKING BACON MANUSCRIPTS IN THE RIVER WYE

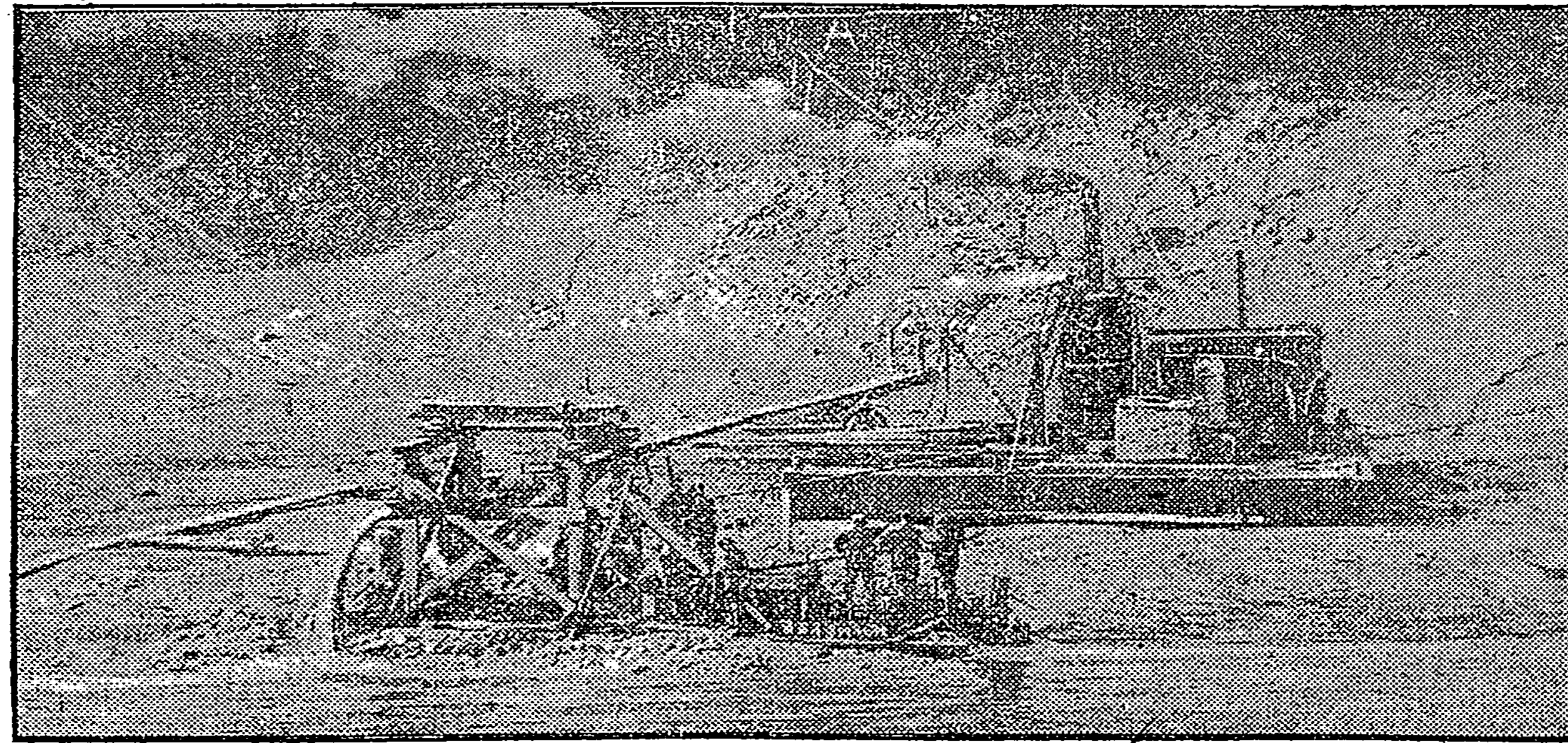
Special Correspondence THE NEW YORK TIMES

LONDON, May 3.—It is eighteen months—to be exact, on Oct. 5, 1909—since Dr. Orville Ward Owen, physician of Detroit, Mich., arrived unostentatiously in the quaint and picturesque town of Chepstow, on the Welsh borderland, with the avowed intention of proving to a scoffing and incredulous world that Francis Bacon was the real author of the Shakespeare plays. As a result of over twenty years' study of Elizabethan literature he claims to have discovered a cipher buried in Sir Phillip Sydney's "Arcadia," but which Dr. Owen insists was also the work of Bacon, which, he says, reveals beyond any doubt that in 1632 Bacon caused to be buried in the bed of the River Wye, which bounds Chepstow, certain boxes, containing, among other historical documents, the original manuscripts of all the Shakespeare plays in the handwriting of Bacon.

At the time of Dr. Owen's arrival in Chepstow he was accompanied by his friend, Dr. William H. Prescott of Boston, a well-known physician and alienist, who has been interested in the Baconian theory for years. Neither had been in Chepstow before, and knew nothing about its history beyond what had been revealed through the medium of the cipher. Yet to-day Dr. Owen positively asserts he has found every landmark mentioned in the cipher—many of which are now known by new names, and only remembered by the older names mentioned in the cipher, by the oldest inhabitants of Chepstow, and, more wonderful, indeed, has succeeded in uncovering a strange oaken structure, beneath which Dr. Owen is confident of finding the cache which, he maintains, holds the missing relics.

Dr. Owen lost no time after his arrival in Chepstow in getting to work. He found that the Wye itself belonged to the Crown, the Duke of Beaufort having disposed of his rights in it some time previously, although retaining the right to flotsam and jetsam.

It therefore became necessary for Dr. Owen to obtain the consent of the British Government to explore the Wye, and also that of the Duke of Beaufort before he could disturb the river's bed. Later it also became necessary to secure the cooperation of Henry Clay, the Squire of Chepstow, now 87 years old, and through whose magnificent grounds it was necessary to pass to reach the river at the spot where Dr. Owen decided to commence operations. All these consents were cheerfully given, the Duke of Beaufort being so favorably impressed with Dr. Owen's theory that he joined Drs. Owen and Prescott in the scheme for the recovery of the relics, and to-day is bearing



Dumping Out the Cofferdam in the Wye in the Search for Bacon Manuscripts.

the greater share of the financial burden, which is said to be about £85 a week.

To hark back to the cipher. To attempt to give any clear idea of how it was discovered would entail weeks of close study. Suffice it to say that it is taken from the third supplement of Phillip Sydney's "Arcadia."

Starting with the word "Bacon" in mind, Dr. Owen begins with the first line in the supplement commencing with the letter "B," and goes on to the end of the sentence. Then he turns to the end of the supplement, and takes the first line commencing with "A," continuing to the end of the sentence. Then back again to the beginning of the supplement for the first line commencing with "C," and so on, alternating until the supplement is exhausted and dozens of sentences beginning B A C O N is the result.

Having done this he makes use of a spider's web, mention of which is made in the preface to "Arcadia," and by ingeniously drawing light lines through all the letters "I" and "Y" appearing on the sheet, he finds that the lines all led to one centre, giving the sheet the appearance of a spider's web, while in the centre itself appear these letters:

H I D
UN
DER
WYE

Which Dr. Owen says clearly means that the treasure for which he is searching is to be found at a given point under the River Wye.

Besides this revealed sentence, Dr. Owen has, by means of circles drawn at various other points on the sheet, discovered sentences which tell him "Buried boxes found under famed Roman Ford," "Bed of braced beams under Roman Ford," "At point off Wasphill," even going so far as to give the dimensions of the structure which will be found over the spot where the treasure lies hidden, telling of a blue "clay" which will be encountered, of the stretch from the clay, and among other "tips," Dr. Owen has found his own name mentioned as the discoverer of the relics.

I merely mention this to show the method by which Dr. Owen has arrived at his conclusions. As I saw the cipher—a mass of letters from which it would be possible, one would imagine, with close application to form almost any sentence—it spoke volumes for the patience, enthusiasm, optimism, and earnestness which Dr. Owen has devoted to his life's work.

Since Dr. Owen began the actual work of excavating in the river bed, he has bored fourteen holes, thirteen of which were abandoned after reaching the rock bottom without result. But at the last at-

tempt, which was begun last week, a strange oaken structure, heptagonal in shape, was unearthed, and it is this upon which Dr. Owen pins his faith, and which curiously enough, follows out almost minutely the details of the hiding place supplied in the cipher.

According to Dr. Owen, the latter gives the measurement of the structure described in the cypher as "Bed of braced beams under Roman Ford," as forty feet long by ten feet wide, lying northeast by southwest under river. The structure discovered by Dr. Owen is about forty-one feet long by eleven wide, while the position is identical with that mentioned in the cipher.

At each end of the structure is a triangle, pointed like the bows of a boat. There are five bars of oak across the width of it from side to side, and the space between these bars is filled up with rock and a peculiar blue clay. The open beams are stout and black with the mud of centuries. Here and there at regular intervals the tops of wooden pegs appear which rivet them to the timbers below.

Eliminate the triangular ends, and the structure becomes an oblong box divided into compartments. It is the centre compartment on which Dr. Owen is now working. As further fulfilling the letter of the cipher, Dr. Owen points to the presence of the blue clay, none of which

Dr. Orville W. Owen's Curious Search to Prove That Bacon Wrote the Shakespeare Plays Interests and Amuses England.

had been encountered in any of the previous excavations.

In company with Dr. Owen, THE NEW YORK TIMES correspondent to-day spent an hour watching the work of excavation proceeding. Already a depth of some

feet has been reached, which is a greater depth than at any previous hole before striking the rock bottom. This is taken as an excellent sign by Dr. Owen, who is as sure as he can

be without absolutely reaching the cache that he has found the right spot. "I am not going to be sure," said Dr. Owen, "until I get the absolute cache. The only thing I am afraid of, if the boxes are not found here, is that Bacon

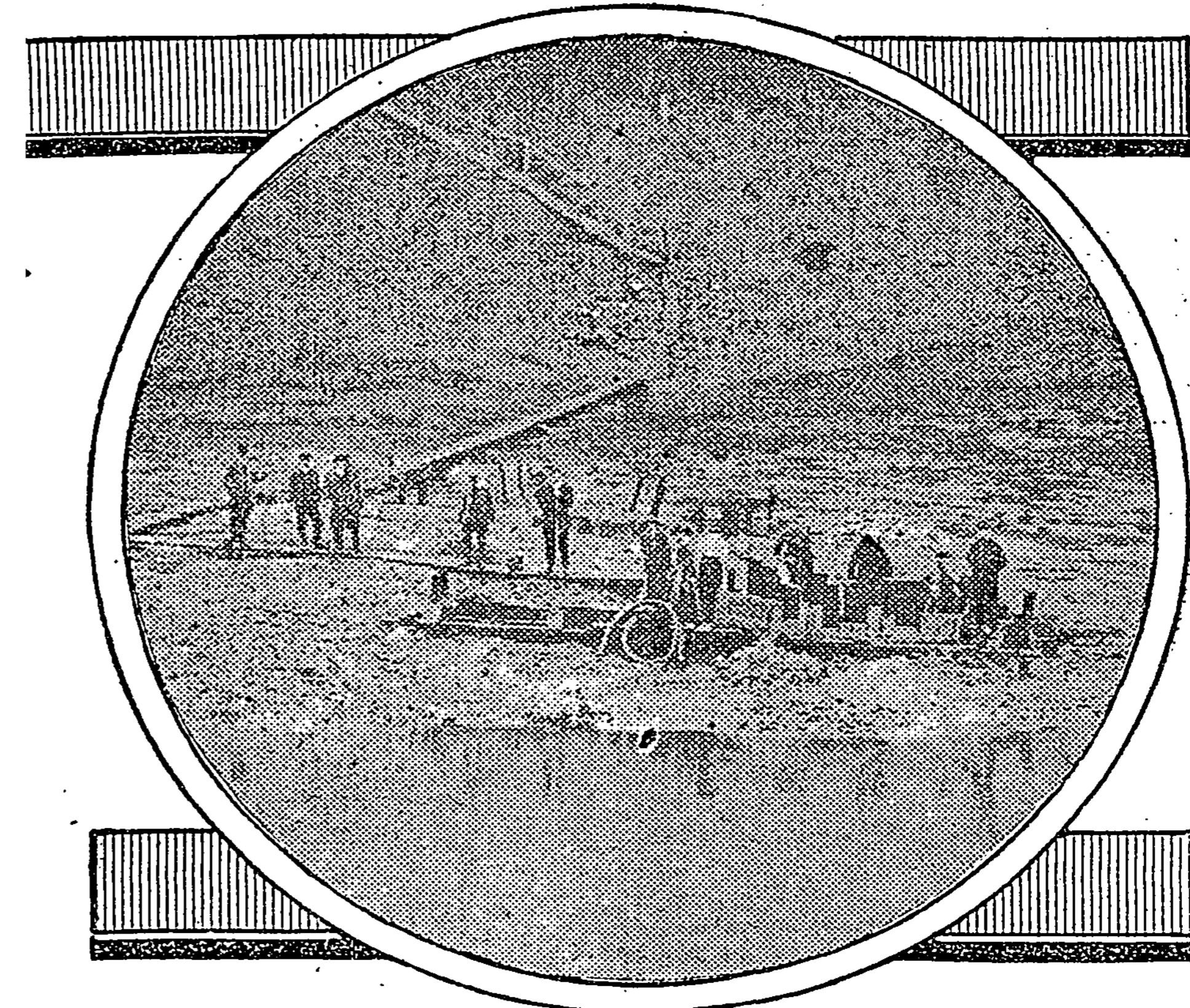
where this structure has been discovered there have been found several beams of old oak, one of which is visible at low tide. This discovery may alter the present position materially and falsify the hopes now entertained that success is practically at hand.

A local historian whom I afterward saw said he was perfectly certain that Dr. Owen was doomed to disappointment, and he expressed surprise that those at the head of affairs could not see that the structure on which Dr. Owen pins so much faith was the remains of a landing stage, another being on the other side precisely opposite.

When asked about this, Dr. Owen would not admit that it altered his conviction in the slightest, holding that the structure on the opposite side was probably the remains of the old Roman ford mentioned in the cipher, and was of entirely different construction to the one on which he was working.

Dr. Owen, who is 58 years of age, is staying in Chepstow with his wife and their four children. He is a mild-mannered man, with apparently only one thought in his mind, and that, as he terms it, the "whitewashing of Bacon." Since his researches have become public he has been much bothered with the ridicule which is being cast upon his attempts, and which ascribes to him statements which, as he says, "those who know me know that it would be impossible for me to make." In one account he is made to say that there are 69 boxes supposed to be hidden in the cache, containing manuscripts of nearly everything written during the Elizabethan period with Bacon as their author, and above all that the original death warrant of Mary, Queen of Scots, will be found.

Then, again, he is quoted as expressing the belief that Bacon, in a fit of temper murdered Shakespeare, cut off his head, and buried it along with the manuscripts. "There is not an atom of truth in these statements," said Dr. Owen. "I don't know what is in the boxes, except that I expect to find the Shakespeare manuscripts in Bacon's handwriting. The rest is merely surmise on the part of imaginative writers."



The Search by Dr. Owen in the Bed of the Wye.

changed their hiding place, or somebody has been here before me and taken them away."

On the other hand, on the opposite bank of the river, in a direct line to