

Mr. JOSEPH TAYLOR sworn and examined.

387. *The Chairman.*] In what capacity do you appear before us, Mr. Taylor?—I am a coal-mine owner residing at Cobden.

388. How long have you been in the district?—About twenty-three years.

389. What mines have you been connected with? Give us a short history from the beginning?—Of course, in the first instance I had nothing to do with it personally. I merely came down with my father when he was appointed manager of the Brunner Mine.

390. Was that the only mine open then?—Yes. It was then being worked by the Ballarat Company, and they had to make a line to the port. They did not use as much energy as they might have done in making the railway, and it resulted in the mines being retaken by the Provincial Government of Nelson. Then so far the connection of my father and myself with the Brunner Mine ceased. Others then took it up. Some little time after that my father and myself took up the Coal-pit Heath, which was the adjoining property to the Brunner. We were the first to work that. We had associated with us some other gentleman who joined in the undertaking, and formed a company in which we were large shareholders. When we had been working for about ten years, and as we were drawing towards the end of our capital, Captain Williams, of Wellington, joined us, and we continued working for another two years. I may say, as a matter of fact, that during its whole career the company had been most unfortunate so far as dividends were concerned, as we never declared one up to the time that Captain Williams joined us nor after. The result was that most shareholders who were in the concern were anxious to get out of it. After that, and seeing that Captain Williams had power to obtain ships, when there would be a better chance of making it payable, we bought out all the others at about the end of the twelve years. In the meantime my father died. The reason of our failure was due to want of shipping. Captain Williams shortly afterwards handed his interest over to his son, who was then going into the shipping business. We ultimately sold out the whole of the interest to the Westport Coal Company. About twelve months before the termination of the twelve years—viz., in 1885—Captain Williams wished to obtain coal for his steamers as freight. There was a strike on then at Westport, and the coal here was in great demand, and the Union Steamship Company's boats came very frequently. Captain Williams was thus placed at a disadvantage, and he claimed that his ships should have first preference, as he was a shareholder in the company. This he did not get, and he informed me this was one of the causes he had for selling his steamers.

391. Whom did he sell to?—To the Union Steamship Company.

392. All his steamers?—Yes. The Union Steamship Company's were at that time the only boats competing with him, excepting the Brunner Coal Company's line.

393. What happened then to the Coal-pit Heath?—We went on for some time, Captain Williams continuing to buy up any shares that might be offered.

394. Then, there was no other material change until you sold to the Westport Company?—No. The cause of our selling was that we could not make any money. We found the difficulties of competing successfully with the larger companies too great.

395. In what year did you sell to the Westport Company?—In 1886.

396. What was it sold for?—£16,000. We had actually expended from £22,000 to £24,000 upon the company according to our balance-sheet. The failure to make the mine pay was undoubtedly due to the want of shipping facilities.

397. Was there no other cause besides the difficulty of getting freights?—No. We had no more than the ordinary mining difficulties to contend with. In fact they were not so serious as they have more recently become.

398. Had you any strikes?—Yes, for higher wages.

399. Have you any knowledge of the state of the mine since 1886?—Yes, I have been down a few times in the mine.

400. What amount of coal was put out from from the Coal-pit Heath?—I could not tell from memory.

401. What was the thickness of the seam?—It varied from 12ft. to 17ft.

402. Was it pretty steady?—Yes, fairly so.

403. Was it obtained by working to the dip?—Only partly. We were working from the dip when we broke off; we had some rise-workings, but they were worked out earlier.

404. This, then, involved the cost of pumping and hauling?—Yes.

405. Did you work it by pillar-and-stall system?—Yes.

406. Had you no difficulty with faults?—Yes; we met a big west fault, besides some smaller ones.

407. Did that cut off your workings entirely?—We never got through.

408. Did you ever try?—No; because we knew the Brunner had already spent a good deal of money on it.

409. How much of that is left untouched?—777 acres is the area; I do not suppose we have worked much more than 50 acres altogether, leaving 600 acres or more to which access has not been obtained.

410. Had you anything to do with any of the other mines?—Only as a shareholder in the Westport Coal Company. I had a few shares in that.

411. *Mr. Moody.*] Who managed the Coal-pit Heath Mine at that time?—Mr. Thomas Alexander.

412. During the whole time?—No. First of all, in the early stages my father managed it during his life. Then there was Mr. Geary, who is now up in Auckland—he managed it for a short time; then finally Mr. Alexander for some six or seven years. He was in charge at the time of the transfer.

413. Have you recollection of the numbers of men employed, and the wages paid?—The