

631. Are there not a week or two holidays as well?—Yes; Christmas and St. Patrick's holidays. I should be glad if they would study the trade a little more, and take the holidays when more convenient. For instance, if a steamer comes in in St. Patrick's week, there is no chance of its being loaded.

632. Are the same men working continuously in the mine, or are they in the habit of changing places? Do they divide the work?—Yes; when there is a greater number of men than we have places for. They have a rule that they will share under such circumstances, taking week about, or something like that.

633. Is this detrimental?—Yes; it keeps down their earnings. It is also detrimental to the working to have fresh men continually coming into the places.

634. How many hewers do you think would be a proper complement for the mine?—About two hundred miners would be sufficient.

635. How many are really employed?—Previous to the stoppage there were 178 hewers.

636. You were, then, not at that time employing the full number of men?—No; because of difficulties with water, and other things, we had not places for them.

637. That is, for the hewing-men?—Yes.

638. Without the Wallsend Mine?—Yes.

639. What proportion of surface-men to that?—The surface-men would be about fifty people.

640. Does that include truckers? Are they included in the two hundred?—There are about forty truckers: that is in proportion to the two hundred. We work the mines in two shifts with these men; that would make 320 to 330 men working two shifts. Previous to that the number had been considerably greater.

641. How many men are about Brunnerton now available for the mines?—There are fully three hundred men available for working—miners and surface-men.

642. Now unemployed?—Yes, I should say so.

643. How many left the district?—A few have gone to New South Wales and other parts.

644. Still you have more men than you need?—Yes. At one time there was employment for a larger number. Prior to the amalgamation, in the Wallsend the average time per man was two days and a quarter per week; and in the other two the average was from four or five, because they had most of the trade.

645. What are the hours worked by the hewers and day labourers, and what drawbacks and overtime payments are made?—Prior to the 8th March the coal-hewers and all other labour employed underground worked a full eight-hours shift. Since that date they have refused to do so, and work what is known as eight hours from bank to bank: thus the company lose an hour daily on all underground labour, and some of the men working on the surface are affected to the same extent. This change took place immediately after the gross-weight system was given effect to.

646. What is the reason of that?—The only reason I can see is that their increased pay enabled them to shorten their hours.

647. Can you give us the general average of wages in the Grey Valley district?—So far as I am aware, the wages for surface-labour in the district range from 8s. to 10s.; there are very few at 8s.; every employer has been by the unions compelled to pay 10s.

648. What is the present state of the mines, and the proportions of solid work and pillar-work, also day work?—At present the mines are being worked on pillar coal only. In Coal-pit Heath, large feeders of water have been met, necessitating constant pumping, and considerable expenditure for new plant. In consequence of the increase of water the lower parts of the workings are flooded, and the solid coal in the mine cannot be worked. In the Brunner Mine we have no pumping; the coal now being worked is on the rise-side of water-level, but, having decided to open up workings to the dip, pumping-plant has been provided, and will be erected forthwith. The present output from this is, as in the Coal-pit Heath, from pillar workings only.

649. What are the different methods of working the several mines, and have there been any alterations or improvements in these methods?—The system in vogue in all the mines is what is known as bord-and-pillar. The headings are turned on the level and driven almost on the full rise. Bords are turned away at 20 yards centres, and being 6 yards wide. The pillars are 14 yards thick. The first working yields about 40 per cent. of the whole.

650. How far will it be possible to take out pillars from the mine to render the other 60 per cent. of coal available?—I think we can get almost the whole of it. We may lose 5 or 10 per cent. in dross and rough, and we shall have to leave some of the pillars to protect main roads, &c.

651. Do you think the system of mining in the past has been such as will admit of your taking out all the pillars as you come back?—Yes; except the pillars at the front, which it will be impossible to touch.

652. How near to the river will they work the pillars?—I do not think it is possible to work any pillars at the riverside of the Brunner fault.

653. Are the Coal-pit Heath pillars quite safe to work?—Yes; being below the water-level, I consider the Coal-pit Heath pillars are quite safe to work.

654. In what condition are the plant and other appliances for working the mine, as to safety and sufficiency for the objects to be obtained?—It has been the constant aim of the company and management to keep the plant in a state of efficiency, and since the amalgamation large sums of money have been spent in adding to and improving the plant; and now we have a quantity of new machinery for pumping, haulage, &c., ready for erection, and which would have been at work but for the stoppage owing to the strike.

655. Could you describe the circumstances that led to the stoppage of the Wallsend Mine, and the reason of it?—Well, the sole reason for this may be said to be want of sufficient trade to keep all the mines profitably employed. It is true that just after the properties were amalgamated all