118. Were there any funds in the hands of the society at the time of the strike?—Simply the current account in the hands of the bankers.

119. The men who left the company's employment got no benefit whatever?—None whatever.

120. Can you tell us the amount of the fund at that time?—I have no idea.

121. At present the fund cannot reach more than £100?—That has been the case since the society started.

122. There could not have been more then?—There could have been more. The particular rule that governs that provides that as soon as the funds reach £100 the subscriptions shall then cease. Well, there may not be any payments on account of sickness, and the fund would increase beyond £100 by the payment of interest. It could not increase much.

123. It could not possibly be £400?—No, and never has been. It could not possibly have been like that at that time. The treasurer or secretary would be able to say exactly what the amount of the fund was at that time.

124. If legislation could provide for registering private benefit societies like this on something of the same lines, do you see any objection?—I can see no possible benefit from it.

125. At present your society has to trust its officers: it is a matter of faith?—Any registered society has to trust its officers. There is nothing to hinder the treasurer from embezzling.

126. A Private Benefit Societies Act would provide simple machinery for proceeding against that man?—Our society provides for the removal of any one found guilty of any wrongdoing. I may say I did not fully answer your question in regard to a man positively refusing to join. I do not think the company would ever go to the extreme step of dismissing a man. It is not usual for a man to fly in the teeth of the wish of all the men, and against the wish of the company too. I do not think the company or the other directors would go to the extreme step of dismissing a man; in fact, I have already declined to deduct the subscriptions from the men's wages.

127. You know it would be an improper proceeding to deduct money from a man's wages without his consent?—Of course, I have never studied the legal aspect of the question much. It might go in favour of the plaintiff if he sued to recover.

128. *Hon. Major Steward.*] The point has never arisen?—No; in fact, we have declined to do so.

William Proudfoot Watson was examined on oath.

129. *The Chairman.*] What are you by profession?—I am general manager of the Kaitangata Coal Company, and have been for the last twenty years.

130. There is a benefit society connected with the Coal Company?—Yes, in connection with the men.

131. Have you got a copy of the rules?—No; but I can get you a copy. [Exhibit 22.] We have no voice in the thing at all.

132. You could give us a general idea of the position?—All I know is that the men subscribe so much a week, and they have a committee amongst themselves. There are a few employés belonging to other societies who do not subscribe to it, but the thing is evidently taken up very unanimously amongst the men. We have not the slightest knowledge of what position they are in. They never ask the company for any assistance; the thing is entirely away from our office.

133. *Hon. Major Steward.*] You have never heard of membership being enforced?—Nothing whatever; I do not think membership is enforced. I know some of the members subscribe to the Foresters only, and not to ours.

134. *The Chairman.*] How are the subscriptions paid—by deduction?—Yes. At one time they were collected at the pay-table as the men were paid, but some years ago they asked us if we would make a column in our pay-sheets, and deduct the amount, and we do so now, and simply send a cheque to the secretary of the society on pay-day.

135. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Did any one ever object to that deduction?—Not that I am aware of.

136. If any objected, would you continue to deduct?—I do not think so. I should be very sorry to do so. Some must have objected, because some are not members, and belong to other friendly societies. I do not think there has been the slightest whisper of complaint at any time.

137. There has been no agreement on the part of the company to enforce the deduction whether the men like it or not?—None whatever; that is a thing I certainly should know. The company has never been approached either by the manager or the employés except when they found it awkward to collect subscriptions every week, and then they asked me to provide a separate column in the pay-sheets, and I said, "Certainly."

138. You know, as a matter of fact, that the deduction is not made with regard to some employés who are members of friendly societies?—I know that as a matter of fact.

139. Do you know if all those from whom no deduction is made are members of other societies?—I believe they are.

140. Do you happen to know if there are any employés who belong to both?—I do not know.

141. Who furnishes to you a list of the names of persons from whom deductions are not to be made?—The pay-sheet is there, and it is returned to us with the columns duly filled up. The company knows nothing of it.

142. *The Chairman.*] Have you any knowledge of how the funds are kept?—They have a treasurer and secretary, and when a person is laid up they give him £1 a week, and when death occurs they pay so much.

143. Do they bank the account?—Yes, in the National Bank; and I believe they have gone so far as having a fixed deposit.

144. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Does the company subsidise the fund in any way?—No.

145. *The Chairman.*] It does not hold these funds and pay interest?—No; they do not bank with us.