

1130. Suppose you pull down a bridge having birch piles, and you replace the foundations of that bridge with concrete, which would cost considerably more, do you consider the concrete piers should be classed as ordinary maintenance?—That is a matter of opinion.

1131. Do you consider that ordinary maintenance or an improvement to the value of the line?—It is an improvement to the value of the line, certainly.

1132. *Mr. Bell.*] The Inspector of Permanent-way under the Government does not have control of the bridges and cattle-stops?—No.

1133. Whose duty is it on this line?—Mine.

1134. Under the Midland Railway Company the inspector of permanent-way did all that?—Yes.

1135. *Dr. Findlay.*] You told the Chairman you thought 25 per cent. was required in 1895 to put these buildings in proper order?—Yes.

1136. Twenty-five per cent. of the original cost?—Yes.

1137. And in fixing that you fixed it as an average over the whole of the buildings?—Yes.

1138. Can you tell me how long, on the average, these buildings had been up?—I cannot say.

1139. Some of them would be quite recently erected, and some of them would be somewhat aged?—Yes.

1140. The average would be seven or eight years up?—About that.

1141. Do you not think 25 per cent. is a rather extravagant depreciation in seven or eight years?—I think it is quite reasonable.

1142. What sum, roundly speaking, do you think was necessary to put these buildings in repair in 1895?—I cannot give that right off.

1143. I want to know, roughly?—I would not say the cost right off.

1144. You would not even fix an approximate amount?—No.

1145. But, although you cannot do that, you think 25 per cent. was the amount of depreciation?—Yes.

1146. Would it not be as easy, or nearly as easy, to give a rough idea of the cost as to fix the proportion you mention? You would not say whether it was anywhere between £500 and £1,000?—I would not like to say unless I went through the books and worked it out.

1147. You cannot say whether it did actually cost 25 per cent.?—As nearly as I can tell.

1148. Have you been through the books for the purpose?—No.

1149. It is merely a speculation—it may be less, and it may be more?—It may be more; I do not think it is any less.

1150. You put in a statement showing the amount of timber required—can you give me an idea of what these repairs cost, roughly?—It all depends on the nature of the work and the place you are doing it in.

1151. Can you give me a rough idea of what this work cost?—Where you have trains running, and you have to pull out timber and put it in, it takes more to do that work than new construction-work.

1152. Can you give me, roughly, an estimate of what this work cost—there are 1,000 ft. of timber?—I would not like to say.

HENRY ST. JOHN CHRISTOPHERS examined on oath.

1153. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am District Engineer of the New Zealand railways, Greymouth.

1154. *Mr. Bell.*] I think you came to Greymouth in February, 1897?—Yes; from Nelson.

1155. You had then been in charge of the Nelson line about four years?—Yes.

1156. And while there you were District Traffic Manager as well as District Engineer?—Yes.

1157. You replaced Mr. McIntosh at Greymouth in 1897?—Yes.

1158. The Government had then had charge of the Midland line about twenty months?—Yes.

1159. What condition was the Midland line in when you took it over?—So far as portions of it were concerned, it was in what I might call fair running-order.

1160. And the other portions?—They were in poor order. Ballast was badly wanted throughout. Some of the structures were in excellent order, and some were in poor order.

1161. With regard to your expenditure on the Midland Company's line which had been seized, was there any difference to the system which obtained in regard to expenditure on the Government lines?—The instruction that was given me more particularly than any other when I arrived was to try and keep as nearly as possible to the same practice that had obtained during the time the Midland Railway Company held possession of their own line; to avoid all unnecessary expense, and to spend nothing that was not absolutely necessary.

1162. Give an instance in regard to the maintenance gangs?—When I came here I found the maintenance gangs composed only of three men—that was, a ganger and two men—one man less than the practice I had been accustomed to in the Government departments. I pointed this out, but the department would not approve of my adding to the number.

1163. On what ground?—I was told that was the practice that had obtained during the Midland Company's time, and that they did not wish to disturb that. That reply came to me on many occasions when I asked for additional expenditure or wished to make a difference in arrangements.

1164. According to you, the expenditure was kept down below the Government standard?—Yes; I always had greater difficulty in getting authorities for expenditure on the Midland line than I had on my own Government sections.

1165. When the line became finally vested in the Governor were the maintenance gangs increased?—Shortly afterwards, to four men.

1166. When was the reballasting of the Reefton-Totara Flat Section done?—It has been done about sixteen months.