

as a Road Board has been to renew all our old bridges and culverts, &c.; and the bridges and culverts we are constructing are now of a permanent character. The old bridges are decaying, and these are the bridges we are renewing in concrete. We have spent nearly £1,200 on culverts and bridges, and we are spending £900 per annum in keeping roads in repair and road-making generally. Of course, our contention is this: We have Road Boards established, and the five men comprising the Board are distributed over the whole of the road district. They know exactly the wants and requirements of the different parts of the road district they represent, and their services are given gratuitously. We meet once a month, and if there is anything special to discuss we call a special meeting, and the requirements of the district are met in every way. If anything is required the surveyor is instructed to inspect. He keeps a gang of men, who work in different parts of the district. And I say this: that if the Road Boards were abolished, and the control handed over to the County Councils, the district would only be inspected by one man, who would be quite unable to report on all repairs wanted, and the roads would get into a bad state of repair. We do all this with a halfpenny rate, and, with the County Council, I cannot possibly see how the work can be done cheaper or more effectively. The whole of our roads are in a thorough state of repair. Of course, nearly the whole of the roads in the county have been formed and metalled for a good many years, and to render them more suitable and more durable I might say our Board has imported a stone-crusher. And the fact of the matter is we do not want to be interfered with by the County Council. We do our own work.

1. *Mr. Hogg.*] What is the total area of your district, approximately?—In addition to the roads I have named, we have a main road of eight miles, from Kaiapoi to the north—the main north road to the northern part of the province. We are in the County of Ashley.

2. How many Road Boards are there in that county?—Eight Road Boards.

3. I presume there is a general county rate?—No; each road district strikes its own rate.

4. *Mr. Meredith.*] The Counties Act has never been in operation?—We had a conference last week, and you have a telegram conveying a resolution moved by Sir George Clifford, and unanimously agreed to by the delegates present, objecting to the abolition of Road Boards.

5. Then, you are of opinion that Road Boards and road districts should not be abolished?—Yes.

6. *Mr. Flatman.*] How do you collect your charitable-aid and hospital rates?—The whole is included in our general rate. Of course, this year we have gone to the expense of purchasing a stone-crusher, and I might say that towards hospital and charitable aid we pay about £300 per year.

7. *Mr. Lang.*] Is the Road Board the only local body in your district?—There is a Water-supply Board which takes in a small portion of the district, and there is a Drainage Board which takes in part of my district.

8. The Counties Act is not in force in your district?—No.

9. *Mr. Guinness.*] What is your total revenue?—Roughly speaking, about £2,000 under a halfpenny rate. The rates amount to £1,284.

10. How do you get the other revenue to make up the £2,000?—We have license-fees, we have the dog-tax fees, and we have a Government subsidy of about £300. Roughly speaking, it comes to about £2,000.

11. The people in your district have not tried the county system?—No, we do not want it.

12. *Mr. Hall.*] How many miles of road are still unmade in your district?—There are a few by-roads, but as a general thing our roads are formed and metalled.

13. *Mr. Stevens.*] I am pleased to hear your Road Board is so successful. Could you suggest any idea by which other Road Boards in different localities could be carried on as well?—Unless it were small Road Boards, then I think you could merge two or more districts into one.

14. You are aware, of course, that there are a very large number of these small Road Boards in the colony, and the ratepayers' money is absorbed in clerical work, and there is only, in a great many cases, two-thirds of the money actually spent on the roads, owing to the fact that there is so little left for the purpose: have you any suggestion to offer?—I dare say the Counties Act would suit a good many parts of New Zealand, but our county wishes to have it made permissive, and not mandatory. There is no doubt other counties might like to adopt the system.

15. There are many. For example, supposing there were one hundred Road Boards in the colony, the administration of which cost one-third of the rates collected, and there were only twenty-five who administered their affairs properly, would you think it reasonable that these one hundred Road Boards should be allowed to continue in order to save such Road Boards as you are Chairman of?—If the Road Boards did not administer their affairs in a proper manner, or if a Road Board cannot carry on its work efficiently with a small rate, I do not see how the County Council can. The only remedy is to strike a higher rate. In this case the Ashley County comprises eight ridings, and if the control were handed over to the County Council they would require a staff of officers, such as an engineer, and other assistance, which I think would swallow up equally as much money as our several Road Boards do.

16. I do not wish it to be understood that I am hostile to your expressions of opinion. I am merely asking for information. I understand the reason of this Bill is to prevent the absorption of the rates in clerical and other work to the sacrifice of the general interests. Do you think it would be improper that we should save the many because, perhaps, we interfere slightly with the few?—No; still, I do not think that those who carry on efficiently should suffer for the many. The only way is to make it permissive.

Mr. J. WRIGHT examined. (No. 3.)

*Witness:* I represent the Eyreton Road Board. The opinion of the ratepayers in my district is strongly against this proposed new measure; and we carry on our finances in a most satisfactory way. Our district valuation is £449,962. The total area is eighty-nine square miles, and the total