

10,662 tons of coal, in addition to 12,048 tons of shale, already mentioned. At Bannockburn three small mines, formerly worked by separate parties but now amalgamated, produced 10,593 tons. None of the other mines in the district had an output of 10,000 tons, but it is worthy of note that at one of the open-cast lignite pits near Mataura this figure was almost reached, the production for the year being returned at 9,477 tons.

The number of coal-mines in the colony which were working last year is 149, giving employment to 2,754 persons. Many of the mines are very small, and are worked for purely local demands, whilst quite a number on private lands are worked for the requirements of the owners only.

Owing to the somewhat increased demand for coal a considerable number of applications for leases of comparatively small areas have been made to the Department. These have been investigated and found in several instances to be for the purposes of speculation. Where the present and prospective requirements of a locality have warranted the issue of leases such grants have been made as will satisfy all reasonable demands. As our coal-areas are a national asset it is the duty of the Government to safeguard such in a proper manner.

With a view to prove the continuation of the Brunner Coalfield in the direction of Greymouth, boring operations have lately been undertaken in the neighbourhood of Dobson by the Greymouth Harbour Board with very promising results. The first borehole is reported to have penetrated coal 12 ft. in thickness at a moderate depth, and further boring, which was put in hand for the purpose of obtaining additional information, has reached coal within the last few days.

In accordance with the desire that the Government should possess and work its own collieries, primarily for the supply of its own requirements, a careful examination was made, by officers of the Mines Department and other experts, of several properties on the west coast of the Middle Island; and the "Cave Area" (a portion of the ground formerly held under lease by the late Westport Cardiff Coal Company, Limited, and not worked) at Seddonville, together with the property formerly held under lease by the Greymouth-Point Elizabeth Railway and Coal Company, Limited (and forfeited for non-compliance with conditions), were selected as suitable places for the establishment of State collieries. Prospecting-works at Seddonville have proved satisfactory, the seam averaging upwards of 14 ft. in thickness, and work has been commenced with a view to the development of the property. It is intended to complete the unfinished railway to the Point Elizabeth property near Greymouth, and to open out the coalfield there. In order that these collieries may be worked economically, safely, and in an efficient manner, with the least possible amount of waste, the mistakes which have been common to some of the mines in the colony must be avoided, and the workings developed in a comprehensive and systematic manner before a large output is demanded.

ACCIDENTS IN MINES.

The following statement shows the number of fatalities which have occurred during the twelve months ending on the 31st December last:—

Class of Mining.	Number of Persons employed.	Fatalities.	Rate per 1,000.
Quartz-mines	4,595	6	1.3
Hydraulic and alluvial mines and dredges	8,132	8	1.0
Coal-mines	2,754	3	1.09
	15,481	17	1.11

The whole of these accidents, together with several of a minor character, have been inquired into by the departmental officers and found to be of a nature incidental to mining-work. The majority of fatalities in connection with dredging operations were the result of boating accidents, although others have been caused by men carelessly oiling or examining machinery in motion, contrary to the general practice on dredges.