

1 *Mr Witty* ] Your roads are very hard to make, are they not, on account of the hilly nature of the country?—That is so. We have a large number of bridges and fords to keep in repair, as the Oxford Road District includes a ridge of hills. The rates are very heavy.

2 *Hon. the Chairman.* ] Will you state the amount?—We have been levying the three-farthings rate and a special rate as well.

3. How much is that special rate?—One twenty-fourth of a penny in the pound.

4. *Mr Guthrie.* ] You said that you have had to make twelve or fifteen miles of road into this back country: do you mean to say that you have made that road out of the rates received from the settled portion of the country?—That is so—out of the general rates of the district.

5 Have you taken advantage of the Loans to Local Bodies Act, and made special-rating areas?—No.

6. You have not approached the Government for any subsidy on the rates you have raised?—We have not.

7 Is your reason for not making a special-rating area and raising a loan, or applying to the Government for assistance—is your reason that you depended upon some day getting these thirds that you claim?—We always looked forward to the time when we should get the thirds from this land.

8. *Mr Anderson.* ] How much land was there of that class in your district?—I am not prepared to state the acreage.

9 Is it valuable land?—No, I cannot say it is valuable land, it is second-class land.

10. *Mr Guthrie* ] The Government gave this land to the Midland Railway Company as an endowment did it not then part with its interest in it?—I am not prepared to say.

11 *Right Hon. Sir J G Ward* ] What are the total loans that you have got?—£1,883.

12 *Hon the Chairman.* ] What is the valuation of the land under the Road Board?—A little over half a million for the district.

13 *Right Hon Sir J G Ward.* ] The security is half a million, and the total loans you have are £1,883?—Yes.

MURTAGH KENNEDY, Member of the Ashley Road Board, Loburn, examined. (No. 4.)

*Hon the Chairman* Will you make a statement?

*Witness* It was a surprise to me to-day to hear Sir Joseph Ward say that it was not the law that we were entitled to thirds on the land that had been sold for cash. We always considered that that was the law of the land at any rate, it was the custom for years, and I do not think that that custom was ever questioned. Settlers in our district have taken up land here and there through this Midland Railway area, and when they have taken it up they have wanted roads. The Board made roads here and there so that these settlers could get access to their lands, and the Board naturally expected that they would be recompensed by the thirds when this other land was sold. When the land was given to the Midland Railway Company, as soon as we got a grasp of the thing, we claimed these thirds, which we thought we should naturally get, and we have since been agitating for them. The Government say that, as no money passed, they could not give us any money, but I think that our right, if it had been cash, was never questioned. I have been a member, on and off, of the Ashley Road Board during the last twelve or fourteen years, and we always looked on it that we had a legitimate grievance, and the local bodies—or several of them—join with us. All the land was sold in several of the adjoining Road Board districts, and they got the thirds as it was sold, therefore they are in a better position than we to carry on their work. The consequence is that we have very little money, and most of our bridges constructed in those days are rotting now and we are not in a position to replace them, and we attribute our position to the fact that we were deprived of what we considered our legitimate revenue. With regard to rating, the Ashley Road Board have been levying a higher general rate than any of the adjoining local bodies, with the exception of Oxford.

1 What is the rate you are levying?—Three-farthings in the pound.

2 *Mr Lang* ] During the time you have been a member of the Board, has the Board received grants from the Government for road-making purposes?—Yes, we have received subsidies.

3. Can you say what would be the total amount you have received during the time you have been on the Board?—No, I could not say offhand.

4. *Mr Ell.* ] Your rateable value is £575,000 what loan have you got?—None at present. We are arranging for one now.

5 *Right Hon Sir J G Ward* ] Do you know that thirds were not in operation at all in any portion of the country until after 1885?—No. It was a surprise to me to hear that it was not the general thing in Canterbury.

6. I may say that in Canterbury, prior to 1885, there were no thirds at all, nor were there in any other portion of New Zealand. What I think you gentlemen are confusing is the system that was in operation in Canterbury under the Provincial Government prior to the General Government going in for thirds at all. Do you know whether that is the case?—It may be, but I did not know that that was so.

ROBERT HENRY GAINSFORD, Clerk, Oxford Road Board, examined. (No. 5.)

*Hon. the Chairman* Will you make your statement, please?

*Witness* I do not think it necessary for me to say much, but I may mention one block of land that was taken by the Midland Railway. It afterwards came back to the Government and was cut up about seven years ago and disposed of in various ways—some of it for cash and some on leasehold. The settlers applied to my Board for roads and cuttings, and so on, and some roads were formed and some cleared of scrub, and some cuttings were made, and the Board were under the impression that they would receive thirds from all the block, containing about 8,000 acres. Then we were informed that there were no thirds payable on the land that was sold for cash. Well, most