

of the land happened to be sold for cash, so the Board were rather let in. We received thirds from one or two other settlements—land that was disposed of earlier.

*Hon. the Chairman* But that would not be Midland Railway land?

*Witness*: No. I may say that we have been striking a three-farthings rate for something like fourteen or fifteen years now—in fact, one year we had a penny rate—and we have a loan of £1,883. The penny rate was levied to meet extra expenditure on bridges and fords after a flood.

LEONARD WALTER BLUNDEN, Settler, Bennett's, examined. (No. 6.)

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

*Witness*: I own part of the back country on the White Rocks Estate, and I can tell you that the road there is in a frightful state, and is causing us settlers much inconvenience. For instance, I had to pay £3 12s. 6d. a ton for the carting of fencing in there, a distance of thirty-five miles, and I am certain I could not get the man to do it for that now. It took three staunch horses all their time to pull a ton. Then, with regard to shearing, we want to put up sheds and improve the place, but we are simply blocked from doing so. If we have to pay £4 or £5 a ton to get our wool carted to the station it will hardly pay us to shear; so that, instead of shearing our sheep at the right time of the year, we have to wait till weaning-time before we can shear our ewes, and then the biddy-biddy is in the wool, and we lose perhaps 2d. or 3d. a pound in consequence.

1 What did you get for your wool this season?—I have not sold it yet. The reason why I did not sell it out here was that through shearing the ewes so late I lost the last sale. When we have gone to the Road Board and kicked up a row about the road they have simply said, "We have no money, and cannot put the road in order. We cannot do it, we are rated right up to the nose now."

2. Are you rated more than three-farthings now?—No, but that is bad enough on the value of the land.

3. *Mr EU*] What is your land valued at?—Two pounds an acre, I think. I gave £2 5s. for it.

4. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Do you cultivate much of the land?—There is no cultivation there at all. There would be if we had facilities.

5 You would cultivate if you had roads?—Yes. I have country there that I could cultivate, but the bulk of it is grazing-country. We simply cannot get stuff carted in there at all now.

6. *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] How long is it since you bought your land?—Three years ago.

7 The question of thirds, then, as far as you are concerned, was known to be in doubt when you bought your land?—Yes.

8 As a settler, do you not think it would be desirable for these Road Boards, who seem to be anxious to evade their liabilities, to go in for a reasonable loan from the State-guaranteed Advances Department and to give you good roads? Supposing they went in for a loan of £10,000 between the whole lot of them, would that not be more satisfactory to you than trying to get thirds?—If they can make out a good case with regard to thirds, and they think you owe them the money, I think they ought to stick to the thirds.

CORNELIUS O'MALLEY Settler, Oxford, examined. (No. 7.)

1 *Hon. the Chairman.*] Did you purchase land on this Railway Reserve?—Yes, a part of the Birch Hill Estate.

2. How long since?—Fifteen months. My father bought a block of land back there about fifteen months ago, and since we have been there the roads have been the trouble all the time. In fact, you cannot get anything in there. You could not get a ton of chaff in there this winter under, I suppose, £5 10s. for carting alone. We have a good lot of fencing to do, and cannot get the material in for that at all. Then there is grass-seed, and material for sheep-yards and huts, and one thing and another, but the carters will not go in. In the summer-time the road is not so bad as in winter but it is bad enough.

3 What did your land cost you when you purchased it fifteen months ago?—Three pounds an acre for 4,000-odd acres, and 17s. 3d. for another 4,000-odd acres. The latter is higher country.

4. Could you not grow chaff on that three-pound land without having to cart it?—Yes, if you could get implements in there.

5 *Mr EU.*] What distance are you from a good road?—About twenty-five miles.

6 Have the Road Board spent anything on the maintenance of your road?—Yes, a little last year.

7 How much, do you think?—Somewhere about £50 I should say.

8 What do your rates come to?—Between £40 and £50 a year.

9 Have you any neighbours there?—Yes, a few.

10 Does the one road serve the lot?—Yes.

11 How much do you think the Road Board are collecting in rates from the settlers round about?—I could not say exactly.

12 *Hon. the Chairman.*] Are there many settlers about there paying as much as you?—There are about five or six who would all pay about £30 anyhow.

13. *Mr Guthrie.*] What county are you in?—Ashley.

14. *Mr Anderson.*] I suppose that if you had a good road to the piece of country you bought fifteen months ago you would have had to pay more money for it, would you not?—Yes, it would be worth more if there were a good road into it.

15 You knew the conditions before you bought it?—No.

16. *Right Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] Do you know whether an estimate of the cost of a road there has ever been made?—No, I do not.