

On the day of the explosion Whorskey entered the mine at about 5 a.m., and about 7 a.m. wrote in his report-book that his district was safe; he reported no gas or other dangers. His daily reports were of a formal nature, seldom or ever varying. If Whorskey had entered No. 6 bord, in which Martin's body was found, and where the latter was passing along and met his death on the morning of the disaster, he (Whorskey) could not have failed to discover firedamp with his safety-lamp, as with the minimum explosive mixture—viz., 5·6 per cent.—his lamp would have become filled with flame, and with a 4-per-cent. mixture the flame would have risen to the top of his lamp-glass.

No. 6 bord, if not actually a working-place, was certainly a travelling-place on the day of the explosion, and it is obvious, therefore, that it should have been examined by Whorskey, in accordance with section 40, subsection (42), of the Act, and Special Rules 17, 23, 24, and 25, but it was not so examined by him, nor by any one on his behalf.

The only surviving official, Joseph Young, now an ex-employee, who had passed the Government gas test, and had formerly acted as assistant examiner of the old workings (or return-air courses), gave evidence to the effect that the state of the mine caused him a great deal of concern. On two occasions last April he had found accumulations of gas amounting to 33,600 cubic feet, and he had found dangerous quantities in the No. 5 district. At the inquest this witness stated that he had frequently found accumulations of gas in dangerous quantities. Daniel Wear, examiner of the old workings (which constitute the return-air courses) stated that there was no one whose duty it was to test for gas in the old workings, his duty being to look for fires. He added, however, that though it was not his duty to do so, he reported the existence of gas whenever it came under his notice. He had never passed any examination in gas-testing. He stated that he visited bords Nos. 4, 5, and 6 on the 9th September, three days prior to the explosion, but saw no gas there. He had no ladder nor any other means by which to test for gas near the roof in any of the high bords of this section, though the fall in No. 5 bord may have afforded means for examination of that particular bord. As the height of many of these bords exceeds 11 ft., the inadequacy of Wear's examination is apparent. The absence of ladders for such examination throughout the mine, as disclosed by the evidence, indicates that the examination of them for firedamp was inadequate and unreliable.

We cannot refrain from referring to the frequent occurrence of gas in dangerous quantities in the working-places of the mine, to which we think that sufficient importance was not attached by the manager.

*(c.) The Character of the Explosives used.*

The only explosives used in the Huntly mines up to the date of this inquiry was Curtis and Harvey's blasting-powder. No objection had been taken to its use by the Inspector or any other person. The mine was regarded as a safe mine, notwithstanding the occasional discovery of gas, as this was not looked upon as a source of danger. The extreme inflammability of the dust in the mine was unsuspected until analyses were made of it after the explosion.

The nature of the explosives used in the mine does not affect our opinion as to the cause of the explosion, for it is quite clear from the evidence that no shot was fired in the mine on the day of the accident.

*(d.) The Withdrawal of Workmen in Case of Danger.*

There was no evidence tendered at the inquiry to show that at any time the workmen were removed from the mine. The mine had for many years enjoyed an immunity from serious accidents, and apparently no occasion had arisen on which danger to life had been apprehended by the management necessitating the withdrawal of the men.

*(e.) The Means of Escape in Case of Accident.*

Three vertical shafts connect the coal-seam with the surface, two of such shafts being equipped with cages and the third with an inclined and protected ladderway.