

248. What were the miners afraid of?—Well, they were not afraid of the manager, because they gave evidence on his side. I may say also in regard to the Taupiri mines that my acquaintance with the union here has been somewhat unfortunate. When Mr. Duncan was secretary to the Miners' Union I have on occasions inspected the mine and found things in very fair order—I am now referring to the Extended Mine—and on a subsequent visit I found a report in the check inspector's book making complaints regarding certain sections of the mine. These I found to be very trivial, and when I said so the check inspectors became very abusive towards me.

249. But prior to this period of two years, do I understand that you derived some assistance from the check inspectors?—Yes, there are check inspectors and check inspectors. I remember Mr. Turton and one or two others who were very decent, respectable men.

250. Is the promoter of this union not Mr. Dixon, check inspector?—I do not know.

251. You have been down the Little dip in this mine?—Yes.

252. Where the rails are lying?—Yes.

253. Did you note where body No. 43 was found?—No, I was not in the mine then.

254. Was that the return or intake airway?—The returns all went along that way.

255. Is it customary to travel return airways with naked lights, in a mine giving off gas?—It is not a travelling-way at all.

256. Is it customary to enter returns with naked lights?—That is in a return where the miners in the ordinary course of their duties have occasion to be.

257. Is it customary for any person to enter return airways with naked lights and to travel them with naked lights?—So far as I am personally aware I do not know that any one did so.

258. I want to know from you, as Inspector Mines, and a man with a considerable amount of mining experience, if any person should travel a return airway with a naked light, and more especially in a mine which is known to contain gas in sufficient quantities to warrant your visiting it eight times in four months?—No, I do not think it would be right to do it.

259. Do you know that on the morning of the disaster certain men are alleged to have been sent there for the purpose of lifting rails—not in the old workings, but in what was for the time being a disused part of the mine?—The evidence given before the inquest shows that that was so, but I have no knowledge of it myself.

260. What is your interpretation of "old workings," and what is the difference between them and that what you call disused workings for the time being?—The old workings were the areas set apart to be inspected by firemen and deputies, and include the Little dip workings, where these rails were lying, and workings which are not in any way connected though close by the present workings of the mine. They are workings just finished, but yet in the centre of the district where the men are at present working.

261. So that the Little dip would come under the heading of "disused workings" and not old workings?—Yes, the section where the rails were lying.

262. And if men were to go there, it ought to be examined by a deputy before?—Yes.

263. And reported in the report-book: is it reported in the report-book as being examined, that particular part of the mine?—I do not think so. He meant that he had not examined it because it was not under his official supervision. I think that was Skellern, who examined the locality. He says in his report, "No. 7 North section and No. 8 Lake section: I, the undersigned, have examined between the hours of 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. all working-places, airways, brattice, and travelling-roads in the above-named sections, also No. 6 stone drive, and found all safe, ventilation good.—J. SKELLERN."

264. *Mr. Napier.*] That is the morning of the accident?—Yes.

265. *Mr. Dowgray.*] Then, if men were deputed to lift rails there, whose duty was it to see that the place was safe?—The manager's. Knowing that they were going into disused workings he should have given instructions to the old-workings deputy or to one of those deputies to make an examination between 5 and 7 on the morning of the 12th.

266. Such an inspection not being recorded, we must assume it was not made?—Yes.

267. In your opinion, should not these old workings be properly fenced off?—Yes.

268. What is a sufficient fence, in your opinion?—If an iron rail be placed across securely about 3 ft. high, the whole width, that would be adequate, unless it was leading to a place where there was a fall and a small accumulation of gas, or likely to be one. Then, I think, a board bearing the word "Danger" should be placed there as well.

269. I was going to ask you your opinion with regard to the instructions to deputies as to examining the mine, in the English Act. Under that Act they are supposed to examine disused as well as working-places?—Well, we had two men here to do that.

270. Every morning, two hours before the men went in?—My contention is that they ought to have been examined not more than two hours before the men went in.

271. We are to report any suggestions necessary to prevent similar occurrences in the future, and we would like your advice as to whether deputies should be required to examine disused workings for the time being as well as old workings and working-places?—Well, I should say Yes, if they were adjacent to the working-places.

272. That was a place where you would derive a supply of your rails: that would be a proper place to be examined every morning?—Well, unless because it was in a section a long way from any other section—except those in No. 5—so that it would come under the designation of "old workings"; but generally speaking I should classify it as "old workings" where rails were lying. If you look at the plan you will see that there are only some four or five bords at the most in the small section No. 5, and there are disused workings between that and 6 and 7, and also above it again to the shaft.