

DANIEL WEAR, DEPUTY, sworn and examined. (No. 4.)

The Secretary read to witness the evidence given by him before the Coroner at the inquest, as follows:—

“DANIEL WEAR, sworn, saith: I am employed in Ralph’s Mine as inspector of old workings, and have been so for the last four years. I have an assistant named Hughes. It takes me six days to examine all the places—that is, to get round. A place would only be inspected once a week. During the last four years there has not been a great lot of gas found in the old workings. About four months ago there was more gas than usual in No. 7 south (marked No. 4 on plan). I went and reported it to the under-manager and he brought down the manager to see it. The gas was removed that night. I put in the report I made [Exhibit N]. It was on a Monday. I think the fan had been stopped on the Sunday night, and that would allow gas to accumulate. That is the only time within the last six months that I have found gas in any quantity in the old workings. There have been other occasions when there were small quantities of gas in the old workings. Any such would be reported in the book. The gas on this occasion was caused by a little fall from the roof. The gas on other occasions has always been caused by falls. I think an inspection of once a week is sufficient. Gas could accumulate in dangerous quantities in a week. It could never be told when there is going to be a large fall releasing a large quantity of gas. It might happen that a heavy fall would drive it to where men were working with naked lights. There would have to be a large quantity of gas before it could be driven that distance. I have been in the mines working for forty-seven years. I have been in the Huntly mines for twenty-eight years. The only other explosion I have known was when Kelly was burnt a little while ago. During that time I have known heavy falls to occur in the roof of the old workings. The occasion I reported—23rd March, 1914—was the largest quantity of gas I have known in all my time. The weekly inspection of old workings has been going on since Mr. Fletcher came—about four years. I had no reason to anticipate any danger. I would call it a dry mine. I would not call it very dusty. On each occasion I have reported gas steps were immediately taken to remove the gas. [The place where the gas was found is marked on the plan ‘Wear’s find of gas.’] During the last three weeks there has been no gas at all in the old workings. There is nothing to prevent any of the miners going into the old workings. I have once seen miners in the old workings where they had no right: this was a few months ago. This was in the little dip. I warned the man back or I would report him. It is not customary for any miners to go into the old workings. I went down in the first cage on the 12th September at 7 a.m. I go down first cage every morning. I went to the cabin near the bottom for a few minutes, and then I went down the little-dip road. I was at No. 3 pump. little dip, taking my clothes off when I heard a roar. My mate Hughes was with me. I heard a roar, and a rush of wind struck us in the face. The wind then seemed to change round to the back of us and knocked me down, putting out my safety-lamp, but not Hughes’s. I did not see any flame. I did not hear any explosion or fall. Subsequently I got out by Ralph’s shaft. I was not injured, except a few bruises. Young assisted me for some time. If Young says there has been more gas in the old workings recently than ever before I do not agree with it. There were no shots fired that morning. The stone workers would have been shooting if they had got to work. The explosion took place before they got to work. I have been down the mine since the explosion. I have been in the old workings since the accident, but not in the old workings near No. 5 and No. 6. I always looked upon the mine as a safe one.

“By Mr. Tunks: I always used the safety-lamp in making my examinations. I had found nothing previously where the gas was found on the 23rd March. I have never found gas in the old workings other than from falls that have touched a small seam in the roof. The falls in the old workings have not been of a frequent occurrence, but at long intervals. I have never found a fall in the old workings sufficiently large to drive gas out to where the men would be working. The nearest point that the bodies were found to the old workings would be a considerable distance. I don’t think gas from the old workings could have reached these men. You can get into the old workings from No. 3 and No. 5. To do that you would have to go through doors or fences. All the other communications are stopped off. The place where the gas was found in the old workings is blocked off the travelling-way in No. 5. It could not possibly have reached the travelling-way. The possibility of gas going from the old workings into the present travelling-ways or present workings would be very remote.

“By Mr. Bennie: There appears to have been no disturbance in the mine near where the gas was discovered in the old workings. I have found a little gas there since the 23rd March, 1914. I have been down the mine since the explosion. The stopping, near where the gas was found, into the main road is intact [marked ‘No. 4’ on plan]. There is no indication or any sign of any explosion having been near there.

By Mr. Napier: From what I have seen since the explosion I am satisfied that the explosion did not take place near where the quantity of gas was found in March.

“Re-examined: I have found gas in the old workings near the little dip. Three men went into the old workings in the little dip to bring out rails, and they carried naked lights. I inspected the little dip on the 9th September, three days before. I have no theory of my own as to the explosion. As far as my knowledge goes there must have been gas there to cause an explosion, and that gas must have come in contact with a naked light. There must have been gas somewhere in the locality of the explosion. I cannot form any idea as to where that gas came from. The deputies would not inspect the old workings in the little dip that morning. I cannot say if they were or not.

“By jury: I hold a fireman’s and deputy’s ticket by examination. I have held it for four or five years.

“By Mr. Tunks: When I examined No. 7 on the Wednesday it was all safe. I have found gas in the little dip; not on the 9th September—it would be five or six weeks ago.”