

286. It is said to have happened in the little dip section, No. 2 bord: have you no recollection at all of Cumming's case?—No, that was an old bord before I came.

287. Then the case of Robert Jenkins, who is supposed to have been injured in No. 7 north when driving a heading towards No. 5: have you any knowledge of that?—No, because that place was stopped when I came.

288. You have heard the evidence of Mr. Molesworth in regard to an ignition when there was a flame, he said, 10 yards long, when he and Robert Neil were working together: was that brought to your knowledge?—I never heard of it till this morning. It may have been anterior to my coming here.

289. He says it was during your management. It was not brought to your knowledge?—No.

290. James Fulton testified to a place being lit by Skellern: was that ever brought to your knowledge?—No, I have made inquiries from Mr. Fulton, and he says that it happened before Raynor had lost his eye; and he had lost his eye, I know, before I came.

291. Did that apply also to what happened in No. 3 bord?—I do not know; it was a sealed-off area six years and a half ago, which, of course, was before my time.

292. We may take it then, Mr. Fletcher, that the cases you reported were the only ones that were known to you?—That is quite true.

293. What is the area of the old workings?—I estimate them at 170 acres. Then there is also No. 3 district, which should be included, and that amounts to about 8 or 10 acres—not more.

294. What is your opinion as to the stability of the shaft-pillars: do you agree with Mr. Reed and Mr. Bishop, who have said they are unsafe?—No; but while I do not wish to pit my knowledge against that of older men like Mr. Reed and Mr. Bishop, I have been here three or four years making periodical inspections all that time, and in my opinion the shaft-pillars are safe.

295. Have you noticed any appreciable fretting during that three or four years?—No, I have not.

296. What is the object of putting in the new fan, Mr. Fletcher?—Well, the company are contemplating going in for some huge developments to the west, and to carry out those developments there will be required more air than the present fan is capable of producing, and with this in view the company has ordered a large-capacity fan. One has to order a fan with an indicated capacity in excess of that which is actually required, because you cannot get the capacity stated by the makers of a fan. That is due to the fact that the makers' tests are carried out under ideal conditions.

297. No instruction or suggestion was made to you by the Inspector or the Department as to the necessity for obtaining a larger fan?—No, that was provided in my plan of future developments.

298. Do you consider that for present purposes your present fan supplies adequate ventilation?—I do.

299. Now, Mr. Fletcher, what underground officials had you?—One underviewer, five day-shift deputies, one afternoon-shift deputy, and one night-shift deputy.

300. How many men were employed on the day shift?—About a hundred and fifty during the last six months.

301. And on the afternoon shift?—Twenty to twenty-five.

302. And on the night shift?—About four at the most.

303. Who was your underviewer?—Williams Gowans.

304. What were his qualifications?—He held a colliery-manager's certificate, first class, of New Zealand.

305. A competent, trustworthy man?—Yes.

306. And in regard to your other five officials, what were their qualifications and experience?—Darby and Smith, I understand, possessed deputies' certificates of service. Smith came from the collieries of Yorkshire, near Doncaster, where he had had practical experience. Darby came from Fifeshire, and had obtained experience at Kaitangata and also at Denniston.

307. And as to the other three men?—Peckham, Skellern, and the third man, Whorskey, were practically trained in the company's service here. I understand that Peckham was a worker in a gaseous mine in Australia for six years.

308. Would you say that they were thoroughly competent?—Yes, I consider them thoroughly competent.

309. To do any work that was required of them in the mine?—Yes.

310. Did you consider them competent to test for gas?—Yes, because they have found gas and reported it. That proved, I think, that their ability to test for gas could not be doubted. The other two men were McGill and Webb. McGill was on the afternoon shift, and was a man possessed of a lot of experience obtained in New South Wales, New Zealand, and Scotland. The night-shift deputy, Webb, holds a second-class Imperial certificate of competency. He comes from the Wigan district, where he held an official position in some large collieries.

311. I understand, Mr. Fletcher, that you yourself, before the establishment of the School of Mines here, took some trouble to give lectures on mining: how long did you do that?—I took an interest in the work for two years.

312. You delivered lectures on mining?—I tried to help the young men who wished to better their positions. I attended forty-six nights in two years. During the first year I had forty-two pupils, and twenty-two during the second.

313. Did your deputies or officials attend those lectures?—Yes, numbers of them.

314. After that, I think, the School of Mines was established here?—Yes.

315. I would like you to give us an explanation in regard to that panel referred to by Mr. Reed, the ventilation of which is said to be defective?—I must explain that on my underground inspections I could only take portions of the old workings and examine them at different