

times, and I think it is about nine weeks ago since the underviewer and I travelled through No. 7 north and worked our way right up into that section. I can only give you the course of the air and how it was distributed by the brattice stoppings that we erected at that time. I cannot give you the data for any later time.

316. It would be the duty of your under-manager to see to that since your inspection?—I do not know that it would. The old-workings deputy was looking after that section.

317. Will you explain the position by reference to the plan [Exhibit DD]?—At the bottom of the winch dip in the old dip there was a current of air from 13,000 to 17,000 cubic feet per minute passing the point marked "J.F." and a heavy three-ply brattice door was hung across the winch dip to deflect or divert the bulk of this air to the right from the point marked "B." This was diverted through the workings by the aid of brattice doors that were left in these places. It follows the line shown in pencil with arrows. There was a brattice door at the point on the plan marked "C." There were also brattices at the points marked "D" and "E." I went through the first cut-through to the left by No. 4 bord, then took the second cut-through to the left into No. 6 bord, and I am certain there was a brattice door at the point marked "F." I did not go through the door, but followed the pencil arrow down No. 6 to the point "G," and when coming along the winch level the underviewer told me that he had given instructions for brattice-cloths at points marked 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 winch level to be renewed to keep the air up into that panel section marked in green ink. I understand that was done.

318. Do you admit that is an unventilated cul-de-sac, that panel marked in green ink?—No.

319. When you went round it nine weeks ago there was a current of air?—Yes, because I travelled with it.

320. And there was sufficient ventilation in that section?—Yes, in my opinion.

321. In the section, including bords Nos. 4, 5, and 6?—It was sufficiently ventilated, in my opinion, with this exception, that in the top cut-through between 4, 5, and 6 I could not swear whether the doors were down or not.

322. Can you say how long it was prior to that visit you had been there?—I could not say, although they were getting coal from that section early last year, about fifteen or seventeen months ago, and the brattice was kept up to the point of finishing.

323. Were you in the habit of using that door?—I used it very often as a short-cut into the dip.

324. Can you speak as to the air that went through that door?—No, and I could not give you the exact time when I went through it last.

325. Did you ever find it stuffy there and foul, such as you would call unventilated?—No.

326. Do you say, Mr. Fletcher, that that section was adequately ventilated?—Yes, in my opinion, as far as the old workings are concerned.

327. Do you say that there was any danger of an accumulation of gas there?—No.

328. There were two occasions, I think, on which the fan was stopped: can you tell us those dates? One, I think, was Easter Tuesday, and the other was a Monday?—The fan would be stopped on Good Friday; there are two or three days in the year when we give everybody a holiday—Christmas Day and Good Friday.

329. The 13th April was Easter Monday: can you say whether the fan would be stopped on that day?—No; on Good Friday.

330. Can you say whether it was stopped on the 22nd March?—No, I cannot say from memory, but I know it was stopped on Good Friday.

331. Do you wish to say anything in regard to the Coal-mines Bill?—No; I think it has been threshed out. There is, however, one matter which I would like to refer to. I think the Royal Commission of 1911 recommended that all future appointees to positions as Inspectors of Mines should be required to hold higher qualifications than those of a colliery-manager. I agree with that, because I think it will raise the status of our Inspectors, although I have no fault to find with the present Inspectors. It will also be an encouragement for students of mining who are not satisfied simply to obtain a mine-manager's certificate.

332. *Mr. Napier.*] In regard to the inspection of the old workings, Mr. Fletcher, is it not a fact that for many years no special officers were appointed for that purpose until you came here?—Yes. It is a statutory obligation upon the manager, however, to see that all return airways shall be inspected once a week.

333. Is there not a direct power in the hands of the Mines Department to order the company to employ special officers exclusively for the inspection of old workings?—No, I do not think so.

334. And for very many years there were no special officials detailed for that duty?—The inspections were made intermittently.

335. For many years there were no special officials exclusively employed on that work?—That is so.

336. Was the appointment of the two officials for this work voluntarily made by the directors of the company?—It was done by the directors on my recommendation.

337. It was after you took over the management of the mine this regular inspection commenced?—Yes, shortly after.

338. I suppose from your experience you are able to say that gas frequently comes out from the working-places in some places?—Yes, in some places, but not in all places.

339. Now, supposing that a man had been working at such a place and went away to his lunch, and on his coming back a small quantity of gas ignited without inflicting any injury, would you call that a minor explosion?—No.

340. It would be an ignition?—Yes, an ignition of firedamp.

341. There is a marked difference?—Yes,