

JAMES BISHOP, Certificated Mine-manager, sworn and examined. (No. 6.)

*Mr. Wilford* : I ask leave, sir, to put in the evidence given by Mr. Bishop at the Coroner's inquest. Evidence read by witness, as follows :—

"JAMES BISHOP, sworn, saith : I am a certificated mine-manager and have something like forty years' experience of mining. I have been in Ralph's Mine some years ago. I arrived here on the 15th September after the explosion. I entered the mine on the 16th, in company with Mr. Bennie and Mr. Woods. Between the 16th and the 24th I have been making almost daily inspection of the workings, with the object of assisting in the discovery of the bodies and the restoration of the mine. On the 26th September, with a view of restoring ventilation in No. 5, I went into the little dip section, and from the point of our striking the haulage level we counted six bords, and the sixth bord has a door and a stopping at the head of it. We went up the bord about a chain and found a stench arising from a body not recovered. There was too much gas for us to go up the bord. Mr. Woods managed to reach the body, and it was removed. The body was lying on the left side of the bord going up. We found it necessary to force a greater volume of air into No. 5 in consequence of the gas which was there. This was done, and by Monday, the 28th, the workings were so far clear as to enable us to investigate the fall near No. 6 bord. On entering the crosscut to No. 5 bord we found a second fall extending from a little below the crosscut for about a chain and a half down the bord. We encountered gas at the tail end of this fall. We then proceeded through to No. 4 bord, and down that to a crosscut which enabled us to get past those falls into No. 6. On testing for gas on the low side of No. 5 we found it there also. This fall in No. 5 was covered with dust produced by the explosion. We could not get to the top of the fall, but as far as we could see there was dust all over it. The fall in No. 6 was a new fall. There was no dust on it. It must have come after the explosion. The indications are that the explosion started either at the first or second crosscut between bords No. 5 and No. 6. The force of the explosion from the point of ignition seems to have been to the door and blown the stopping out. There are indications of a second blast extending down the bord. Another small stopping had been blown out. The bricks from the larger stopping had been blown about 2 chains down the bord. From that point the force seems to have travelled towards the main haulage-road, going west towards the bottom end of No. 7 and east with very considerable force to the shaft. The marks of force in the haulage-road going towards the shaft are very pronounced. Towards Taupiri West section the force extended for several chains in that direction also, as indicated by broken tubs. In my opinion, the accident was due to an ignition of a small quantity of firedamp augmented by the volume of dust which would be sent up in clouds. The inflammability of dust from this mine lends strength to this opinion. I produce a statement showing the inflammability of dusts taken from this mine, supplied by the Government Analyst. The dust was taken—No. 13 from bord W.C., No. 5 district; No. 14 was taken from near No. 6 cabin haulage-road; No. 15 from main haulage-way at No. 4 level; No. 16 from piece of Ralph's Colliery coal; No. 17 from brattice from near flat sheet, No. 5 jig. (Mr. Woods states that the dust No. 13 was taken from the spot marked 'Dust' on plan.) A copy of the report put in and marked 'S.' I believe Martin would be the man who caused the explosion through coming into contact with the gas with a naked light. There is not much dust in the mine as far as I could see. The greatest proportion of force was exercised in the main haulage-road. The portions of mine not affected by the explosion were not so dusty as to call for special precautions while the mine was being worked. Those portions would be fair samples of the rest of mine. Once an explosion is started it would find its own dust as it went along. Very likely there are a series of explosions. We tested for gas in the stone drive in Kelly's drive. There was a very small percentage of gas there. It was only found in small quantities in the roof. It seemed a very good plan on first sight to have a weekly examination of the old workings, but I think now there should be in future a stricter examination of the old workings. I would not blame a manager if he had not had the old workings inspected at all unless he knew there was gas there. If a manager knew there was gas in a particular old working he should make more frequent examination of that place twice or thrice a week. Falls occur more frequently in old workings than where the men are working. A fall might cause a liberation of gas in large quantities. Any percentage of gas I would consider dangerous if it was in the return air. Any percentage of gas would be dangerous if shots were being fired. I would not consider 2 per cent. of gas dangerous in the old workings. The safety of the mine depends largely on how the deputies perform their duties. They climb a ladder to test the air at the top of a stope, sometimes by a light on a pole.

"By Mr. Napier : I consider that in establishing a weekly inspection of old workings they—the management—did something not provided for by the Act and something that tended to the safety of the mine. The increase in size of the old fall must have taken place before the explosion."

1. *The Chairman.*] Is there anything, Mr. Bishop, which you would like to add to that statement before you are questioned any further?—No.

2. *Mr. Wilford.*] Are you at present employed by the Government, or by the Taupiri Company?—I am not employed at present by any one.

3. What was your last employment?—I was manager of the Point Elizabeth State Coal-mine. I came here to see if I could be of any service to Mr. Fletcher since the explosion.

4. Will you tell me what are "shaft-pillars"?—The pillars surrounding the bottom of the shaft, left to support the shaft.

5. Are they of any particular size, or of a size fixed according to requirements?—They are generally larger than any other pillars in the mine.

6. Of course the pillars must be of adequate proportions for the safety of the mine?—That is so.

7. Would you say, from your experience, that the pillars in this Ralph's Mine are of adequate proportions to support the shaft?—I scarcely think the shaft-pillars are such as are calculated to maintain the shaft in a proper condition. I think they are too small.