

Mr. Millar told the deputation that the rumour that they would divert their coal trade was unfounded, so I take it that the loss of the coal trade here is only because the boats cannot get into the port.

5. The boats cannot carry the loads on account of the depth of water?—Yes.

6. You have gasworks of your own here?—Yes.

7. Have you found a difficulty in getting coal for the use of the gasworks?—Yes.

8. What is the loss to the borough in consequence?—On one occasion two or three years ago I distinctly remember that it cost the Borough Council £15 extra through having to get coal round by rail as compared with what it would have cost at the port. That was due to the conditions in the river and being short of coal.

9. Has the diminution in the amount of coal imported affected the demand for labour on the wharf?—Yes, considerably. There has been a distinct loss in wages during the past six years. According to the statistics of Levin and Co. there have been 55,000 tons less brought into this port as compared with the coal brought in prior to that. Every 250 tons of coal brought to the port represents about £15 or £16 in wages. There used to be fourteen and sixteen coal-steamers loaded with coal coming here per month, whereas now the maximum is one to two.

10. Through the harbour not being kept in good order, how has it affected your business?—It has cost me hundreds of pounds during the last few years. All my goods are landed free at the nearest port; but hundreds of times owing to the boats being detained I have wired to my people to send the goods round by rail, and that means that instead of getting the goods carried free I have to pay all the freight on account of their coming by rail.

11. The great difficulty about the river is that you cannot get a regular time-table?—That is so. I might say that, having a business in Levin, I wished to make this port a distributing-centre, but I failed to do it on that account. During the last five years goods to the value of £20,000 would have come through this port had I been able to make this my distributing-centre.

12. And the difficulty is owing to the condition of the bar and the shoals, which prevents a regular time-table?—Yes.

13. Are you satisfied that the harbour is going back year by year?—It is a difficult question to answer. The experts report that the bar at high spring tide used to be 9 ft. 6 in., but the "Kennedy" was lately shut out on a 7 ft. draught.

14. From your experience the borough gasworks cannot get the same cargoes of coal over the bar that you used to get?—I think they get most of the coal through the port, but we have to order in small quantities of 60 tons.

15. In regard to finance, you were a member of the Harbour Board when the Government offered to sell this wharf to the Board for £28,700?—Yes.

16. Was there any chance of getting the district to finance that?—No, there would not have been, for the reason that they felt that to rate themselves and then for the Railway Department to take what the ratepayers thought was their own was practically rating themselves twice.

17. They would not rate themselves?—No, I do not think so.

18. Supposing you get a favourable result and these wharves are acquired by the Harbour Board, would there be any difficulty in getting the inhabitants either by private subscription or by means of a rating-area to put up £15,000?—I can say this: that if the Harbour Board were granted the wharves and wharfages for anything within £10,000 I do not think there would be any difficulty at all. I am putting it at the maximum. I believe even to that extent we would be prepared to subscribe it. I think we would get it by private subscription at a fair rate of interest.

19. *Mr. Myers.*] I suppose you know that a dredge would have to be bought?—Yes.

20. That is another £8,500?—Yes. May I suggest that if the Government were selling this wharf to us they might treat us in the same way that they treated Onhunga—to pay it off by a series of payments.

21. But even then you would have to buy a dredge?—Yes.

22. Where are you going to get that money from?—If we could arrange with the Government to make it an annual charge, the sum of money could be raised privately to purchase the dredge, and not to find the other capital sum.

23. Where are you going to raise that from except from the Government—do you think the money could be raised locally, or how?—I think a certain sum of money could be raised locally.

24. On loan, or gift, or rating-area?—On loan. Having vested interests, the people would be sufficiently interested in the prosperity of this port to do so. They would know there would be a great increase in the prosperity of the port, and therefore land-values must go up.

25. Then your idea is that you would not so much depend upon a rating-area, but that the people would find the money from their own pockets and lend it to the Board?—I am not prepared to say that. It is a very difficult question to answer. The people about here have landed interests, and knowing that the port would be improved to such a great extent, I believe at a sacrifice they would do so.

26. You have been Chairman of the Harbour Board?—Acting-Chairman.

27. You are in business here, and I suppose you have kept in touch with harbour matters?—To some extent.

28. I suppose you have as many vessels in the aggregate coming here in the aggregate as you used to have?—I do not think so.

29. Then you can explain how it is that if the vessels cannot carry so much on account of the condition of the river, and that there are not so many vessels coming here as there used to be, that there is so much more stuff taken away from Foxton than there used to be?—I understand there is more general merchandise coming in, but less coal shipments.