

No. 3.

EXTRACT FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT ON INSPECTION OF COAL MINES, MIDDLE ISLAND DISTRICTS.

Mr. Inspector BINNS, F.G.S., to the UNDER-SECRETARY for MINES.

SIR,—

Dunedin, 9th June, 1885.

I have the honour, in accordance with section 40 of "The Regulation of Mines Act, 1874," to make the following Report, for the information of His Excellency the Governor :—

During the 12 months that have elapsed since my last Report, I have been unable to devote so much time as usual to the actual inspection of coal mines for various reasons, among which, may be mentioned, 3 weeks' attendance in Wellington during the hearing of Messrs. Rich and Williams' Petition; 6 weeks' illness in the summer, and about five occupied in examining some coal outcrops on Mount Hamilton, and in accompanying the Hon. the Minister on two tours—one to the Wilberforce Quartz Reefs, and the other to the Auckland District. With these exceptions, the whole of my time has been occupied in carrying out the duties incident to my position as inspector under the above Act, and under "The Westland and Nelson Coal Fields Administration Act, 1877." Attached to the Report are tables of statistics and accidents; the latter, unfortunately, very numerous. I have to thank those managers and owners who have kindly furnished particulars of outputs, &c. The following is a *résumé* of the work done in connection with each mine; or, at least, so much as is necessary for a report of this nature.

PELORUS DISTRICT.

6. *Picton Coal Mine*.—Examined the 10th October, 1884. The law was neglected in the following respects, viz :—(1) Shaft unfenced; (2) no plan; (3) no special rules; and, (4) no report kept. On the other hand attention had been paid to (1) cage cover; (2) good ladders and platforms; (3) powder regulations; (4) hours of work for engineman; and, (5) signals in shaft. This mine is still working, but doing very little.

WEST WANGANUI DISTRICT.

7. *Collingwood Coal Mine, Collingwood*.—Examined the 16th October, 1884, at which date 16 men were employed, but, owing to the thin seams and various difficulties, the output per man is not large. Most of the coal was raised from No. 1 seam, and lowered 135 feet by a very efficient self-acting aerial tramway. Another useful piece of machinery is a self-acting water-balance tramway for taking slack to the shoot. The mine was pretty well aired, and a daily report kept, but Mr. Rees (the general manager) had omitted to make a weekly report on the machinery. General and special rules were distributed. Altogether the Act was well kept, and the mine apparently carefully managed.

WESTPORT DISTRICT.

8. *Koranui Coal Mine, Westport*.—Not visited since my last report. Has been worked only during a portion of the year. A fatal accident, which occurred here on the 14th July, is mentioned in its proper place. This property is now in the hands of Capt. W. R. Williams, of Wellington, who informs me that 150 tons a day is the present output.

9. *Banbury Coal Mine, Westport*.—Visited the 24th October, 1884, at which date the mine was in pretty good order, though the new workings, in the thick coal, were not very well ventilated. Mr. Elliott was making a new travelling road to obviate the necessity of men walking alongside the moving chain. An unfortunate strike having occurred here, the output for 1885 will doubtless greatly suffer; that for last year showed an increase of nearly 40,000 tons on 1883, and Mr. Dickson informs me that during the year 1884, owing to the bad state of the bar at the mouth of the river, the Company's three steamers short-carried 26,191 tons, being a difference in net earnings of over £13,000. Owing to this cause, and the above-mentioned strike, the production was seriously restricted. Now that the harbour works are in hand, and a good port in prospect, no doubt, the output will be correspondingly large. The custom of riding on the surface incline has now, I hope, completely died out, as a good track exists from the foot of the hill to the summit. As will be seen from the accident list the casualties at this mine have been very numerous; some of them, however, were of a very slight nature.

None of the Reefton mines have been visited since my last Report; the whole of them (7 mines) employ only nine men below ground.

17. *Brunner Colliery, Greymouth*.—The great event of the year, as regards this mine, has been the discovery of coal beyond the large fault, which has retarded the *exploitation* of this mine so long. This was done by means of the level drive commenced many years ago at the suggestion of Dr. Hector, F.R.S. The dislocation, it will be remembered, died out at the extreme rise, and appears to increase to the dip. Now that the position of the coal is known, somewhat costly works will be required to reach this portion of the field. On the 28th October I examined the mine and found no gas, though a small district in the dip was being worked with lamps, on account of the occasional appearance of fire-damp. The whole of the coal from the rise-working was at this time brought down by a self-acting endless rope, 830 yards long, with one curve in its course of about 16 degrees from the straight line. The accidents in this mine during 1884 were not numerous, but included one man killed and one slightly burned. During 1885 one man has been killed by a fall of coal. Under the head of "Prosecutions" will be found an account of action taken by the manager of this mine against a workman who entered his place, before it had been examined.

18. *Coal Pit Heath Colliery, Greymouth*.—This mine was last visited on the 30th October, 1884, on which occasion there was a little gas in some of the places which were worked with locked safety lamps. The report was 3 days late. Since my last report working has been carried on in the dip, and the ventilation of the mine, having become somewhat difficult, Mr. Alexander is now fitting up a fan. The result of working pillars in the Brunner Colliery has already been referred to in the report on that mine. With every feeling of sympathy for the Coal Pit Heath Proprietors, I cannot see any way out of the difficulty, unless some arrangement could be arrived at by which the two companies could work from one shaft, thus enabling the lower mine pillars to be worked, and saving the expence of hauling and pumping machinery in the Brunner dip. It is now, however, probably too late for any combination of this nature.