

off in proximity to where the naked lights were being used, would not allow the men to continue working in that place.

322. Can a deputy tell what is coming within the next hour?—He would by testing occasionally for it.

323. You say when you were deputy in the Wallsend Mine you did not make a report until you came out in the evening?—As a rule.

324. Are you aware that you were committing a breach of the Mining Act?—No. I was working there seven years ago under the old Act. I am referring to the old Act.

325. You have not read the Mining Act then?—I think so.

326. Did you, as deputy, fire all the shots in Wallsend?—I fired all the shots in Wallsend after that explosion.

327. Was all the air going around the sump-workings before the explosion?—I do not know.

328. What did you generally tamp the shots with?—We would not allow the man to tamp the shot until the deputy saw what he was going to tamp with, neither to cut the fuse until the deputy cut it for him.

329. *Mr. Proud.*] Do you think it wise to have a special man to fire the shots?—I think so.

330. *Mr. Park.*] What was the date of your appointment to go down the mine?—It must have been two days after the explosion; we were down on the 28th of March.

331. Could you tell whether the falls you saw in the return had occurred before or after the explosion?—Some had fallen since the explosion, and some in my opinion before. The difference between those fallen before, and those that had fallen since was shown by the deposit of soot and bits of coal, while another fall was clean.

332. What good would it have done if there had been stronger stoppings in the main incline?—If the stoppings in the main incline were tighter than those which were there, it would have made no difference.

333. *Mr. Guinness.*] You have said in your evidence that the reason you did not go into the mine to examine the lower workings was because the management considered it unsafe?—Did I say management?

334. Yes?—The management told us that it was the inspectors' instructions that no one should go in until the air had been sent through to make it safe. I meant the inspectors, not the manager.

335. *Mr. Beare.*] It appears that your theory is that the greatest force rising up from the lowest levels indicated to you that it was a gas-explosion, and the natural tendency of gas being to rise, there must have been an immense accumulation of gas to produce an explosion?—Yes.

336. Then there must have been a very large accumulation of gas in the workings lower than you went down, if your theory is correct?—There must have been a good bit of gas below, and I gathered from the indications that that was the seat of the explosion.

337. That is to say, there must have been considerable accumulation of gas to produce the explosion and effects it did?—If there was gas there it may have accumulated more as it travelled along.

*The Chairman:* I did not understand Mr. Russell to give an opinion as to the origin of the explosion. He said it was either coal-dust or gas; he did not say it was gas.

339. *Mr. Beare.*] You say, in reply to a question, that no practical miner would put in that shot if he wished to strip the pillar. Supposing there had been a hole there, would a miner have taken advantage of it and risked the consequences?—I could not say. I think the miner was alone when he drilled that hole.

340. *Mr. Joyce.*] If a man wished to rob that pillar, would not he be able to find a more convenient place to do it than at the blown-out hole?—He would take the coal off the side of the slit.

HENRY ALDBOROUGH STRATFORD, Warden and S.M., Greymouth, examined.

341. *The Chairman.*] One of the items we have to inquire into under this Commission is to ascertain whether any inquiry into the cause of the disaster has taken place; and, if so, what was the nature of such inquiry? And how was the tribunal constituted? The second question, as to how the tribunal was constituted, is the one into which we have to examine you now. Kindly state what steps you took on hearing of the accident with a view to holding an inquiry?—On the evening of the 26th March I was at the mine and some bodies were brought up. Immediately some of the relatives, who were in very great distress, surrounded me and asked my permission to take the bodies to their homes. I ascertained that it was likely to be a very tedious work to get the bodies up, and I determined to hold the inquest over a few days, in order that I should have a sworn jury to view all the bodies. On my way back I gave instructions to Constable Beattie, who was the constable at Brunnerton, to prick off a list of about a dozen of the best men he could find. I warned him not to get any disqualified persons, explaining to him what that meant, but to put some miners on the list, so long as they were not disqualified. I explained to him what I meant by being disqualified—that they should have no interest in the mine whatever, and not have been recently employed, or likely to be employed again, by Mr. Bishop, and in order that they should have no interest in concealing anything on account of their being employed, or likely to be employed, at the mine. On the morning of the 27th March, at an early hour, I went back to Brunnerton, and the distress then was so great—so many women coming to me crying to be allowed to take the bodies to their homes—that I determined at once to summon the jury to view the bodies in order that they might then be sent to their relatives' homes at Brunnerton. I then proceeded with Constable Beattie to the Courthouse to see his list, and to take his opinion about the various names, numbering six, two of whom I believe were miners. After asking him some questions, I learned that both of these men in some way or another had some interest in the mine on account of having been employed there. I, therefore, would not put them on. I did put on the name of one