

1060. *Mr. Proud.*] You mentioned about the falls of roof and sides. Do you not think that if there were a proper system of timbering and examination of the slab of the coal, accidents from falls of roof and sides might be reduced?—We keep up the Northumberland system: as soon as the men pass a certain point, the deputies undertake the retimbering.

1061. You have the deputy system?—Yes, and the deputies are in all the time.

1062. Does not that conduce to the safety of the mine?—Yes; up to within eighteen months ago we had very few accidents. We had one bit of bad luck, and then we got down to the normal condition of things again.

1063. Can you give any farther information as to what you observed in the Brunner?—Nothing more than what I have already stated to you about blown-out shots. If you think it is necessary, I can produce the overman who was with us when the blown-out shot took place in our mine. He is with us still. His name is John Harris. There is no firedamp there.

1064. Can you suggest anything to the Commission with a view to preventing similar disasters?—The idea thrown out by Mr. Joyce is a very good one—viz., that the shots should be fired by skilled men only. It would secure greater safety to the working-miner. One is often asked for work by a man who is not a miner, and, assuming that there is no skilled man to superintend the use of powder, he is sent into the mine and has to take his chance.

1065. *Mr. Skellon.*] The Act says that no person under the age of eighteen years shall be allowed to charge a hole. Do you not consider that clause wants altering?—I think that if the idea were carried out that has been suggested, that the shots shall only be fired by special men, it would remove the danger altogether. I think the colliers themselves would look upon it as a boon.

1066. You saw the return airway?—Yes.

1067. Do you consider it good enough for a travelling roadway?—Do you mean under ordinary circumstances?

1068. No; under extraordinary circumstances, when a man would require to get out quickly after an accident?—In the case of an explosion, if a man attempted to travel through the return, he would not be in the same condition of mind as he would be under ordinary circumstances. The place might also be changed as the result of the explosion. In this case the timber had been scattered about in all directions, and falls had taken place. But for an old mine it was a very reasonable airway. I have had the opportunity of travelling a good many airways in Northumberland, and have seen many that were no better, and yet employing many more men.

1069. Of course, we are advancing now?—Yes; during the last twenty-five years.

1070. Could not there have been gas in the working-places from 8 to 9.30 a.m. without it being noticed by the workmen, supposing they were “holing”?—There are none of those places very high, and the men carried lights in their hats.

1071. While they were “holing” on the ground?—I do not think they did. I noticed the men kept their lamps in their hats “holing” or not “holing.”

1072. But is it not possible there was gas?—It is quite possible that some accumulation of gas may have taken place.

1073. You say the roadmen did not make special reports?—They do not report in writing. They report not only at the end of the shift, but during the day. We have no report-book at all.

1074. *The Chairman.*] They report verbally?—Yes, and frequently during the day. What we call roadmen are the men engaged in bringing out the coal.

1075. *Mr. Beare.*] Is the fireman a deputy?—Yes.

1076. *Mr. Park.*] Mr. Bishop told us that the exploring bords [indicated on plan] were full of water. Would there be any possibility of gas coming from those exploring bords?—There would certainly be less chance on account of water being there.

1077. These bords would only be filled with water on account of being the lowest part of the mine?—That was before the explosion.

1078. During the working of the mine, could any gas accumulate there?—I do not think there would be any gas there.

1079. Whether there was any water or not?—I do not think there was the slightest chance of it.

1080. *Sir J. Hector.*] If gas was given off, what would become of it?—It would be diffused.

1081. *Mr. Park.*] You said there was a dissimilarity in bord 4 as compared with other bords?—Yes.

1082. Was there any great dissimilarity in the signs in the other bords?—Not much.

1083. They were pretty well all alike excepting No. 4?—Appearances were very much the same in all the other bords.

1084. *Mr. Beare.*] Before the Brunner explosion, I believe, in your mine shots were fired by miners, and the blasting was carried out absolutely by miners, like the system adopted in the Brunner Mine?—Yes.

1085. A question has been suggested whether lives might have been saved if there had been another outlet or air-shaft?—I think the poor fellows were doomed from the very first, no matter if they had another outlet. Supposing you could get up that road, then the impure air could get up also.

1086. Then, the mere putting-down of another shaft would not have saved them?—It would not have been any good. The amendment pointed out by Mr. Joyce is the one we shall have to take in the future—viz., the proper supervision of blasting.

1087. And not allowing the use of blasting-powder?—I do not know that it would be any great hardship to abolish it. It is a source of danger on account of careless tamping.

1088. *The Chairman.*] There is no danger of careless tamping with roborite?—I do not think there would be any great hardship if a high explosive were substituted, and every other precaution taken. We are all anxious for that.